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THE NEW REPUBLIC

ELECTION SPECIAL

COOLER HEADS PREVAIL

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Charles Schumer, and Russell Feingold.)
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CORRESPONDENCE

Religious rights

To the editors:

Peter Beinart's effort to describe the Christian right's origins and base is fair-minded ("Battle for the 'Burbs," October 19). It does not condescend or vilify. Nevertheless, Beinart's argument about rural nostalgia is overdrawn. Conservative Christian political movements count large numbers of immigrants, first-generation Americans, lifelong urban-dwellers, and nonevangelicals among their ranks. Beinart correctly identifies concern about public education as a motivator for Christian conservatives in politics. But he forgets that rural schools of past decades were not the only institutions that stressed core knowledge (yes, including phonics), avoided taking stands on contentious political issues, left discussions of sexuality to families, enforced rigorous classroom discipline, and expected teachers to display competence rather than simply a union card. That model applied as well in most urban settings across the nation. If we must identify a single trend underlying the growth of the Christian right in politics, let's focus less on rural-suburban migration and more on the massive—and failed—"progressive" experiment in our schools and other social institutions.

GARY L. GEIPEL
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

To the editors:

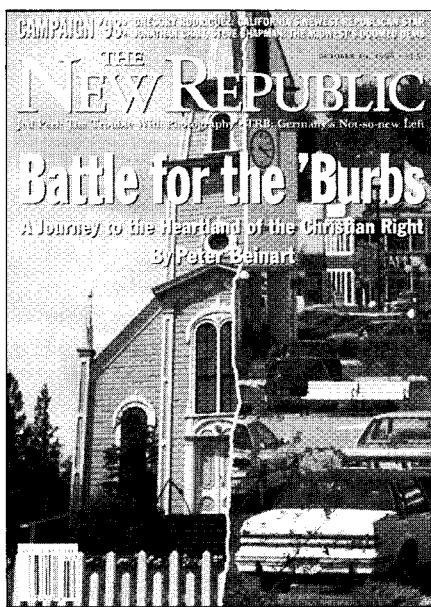
Peter Beinart's analysis is a good starting point for readers who wish to understand the Christian right. But, as a first-generation evangelical Christian born and raised in New York City, I know that this is an issue of concern not only to those raised in rural America, now highly educated and living in affluence in the "outer-ring suburbs," who yearn to recapture their childhood from the 1950s. This clash of worldviews is not limited by race, geography, or status in life. Rather, the political conflicts highlighted in the article stem from one simple philosophical blind spot of the Kantians: their worldview is tenuously held together by a belief in one fundamental "truth" that everything is relative. Once those who advocate "tolerance" recognize that they are no different philosophically from Baconians, who believe in absolute truths, we can start working together in a true spirit of tolerance and pluralism on the issues mentioned in this article. Until then, there will unfortunately continue to be flash

points of contention in the "culture wars" across America.

PHILIP D. ESKELAND
Vienna, Virginia

To the editors:

Peter Beinart's article was quite well done and, for the most part, an interesting analysis of Christian-right activism. However, his comments about the fact that the conservative Christians in Olathe support the use of phonics because of their nostalgia for the way they were taught to read may mislead readers about the intellectual disagreement among educators concerning phonics and whole language. Aside from what the Christian right thinks about reading instruction, the fact is that whole-language reading programs, as used in most school districts across the



country, have been a near-total failure in teaching reading to a large minority (up to 50 percent) of children. The children most likely not to suffer from the whole-language approach are usually those who learn the fundamentals of reading despite formal instruction. The idea that schools using whole language "blend the two methods" is most often not the case. If such a tactic were seriously used, we would not continue to have very high percentages (up to 50 percent and more) of students graduating from high school unable to read even fourth- to sixth-grade material.

MILTON LECOUTEUR
Seattle, Washington

To the editors:

While I certainly do not have the same political perspective as Christian conservatives, I am able to understand their desire to become politically active in the hopes of securing government positions that are to their liking. But, when

I read that they don't want the government to "interfere with their children's right to ... evangelize," that is something else entirely. Right to evangelize? What about the right of other children to be free of the pressure implicit in proselytizing?

ARLENE KUSHNER
Rockville, Maryland

Senselessness

To the editors:

Thomas Nagel says all that needs to be said apropos Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont's book against fashionable French postmodernist nonsense ("The Sleep of Reason," October 12). We should indeed be scornful of such ignorant, arrogant, and irresponsible chitchat masquerading as theory.

But Sokal and Bricmont do not seem to realize that they have been hoaxed themselves: not all of the writers they are quoting are wholly serious. The exaggerations, paradoxes, po-faced jokes, and pseudo-learned spoofs are part of a long tradition of romantic and avant-garde irony. The French authors cited by Sokal and Bricmont are not solemn academics in the Anglo-American sense—it is only their transatlantic followers who would make such stolid claims, since American intellectuals dwell in the groves of academe, and they must transform everything into a specialism in their galant struggle for survival.

Somebody has read literature as peer-reviewed academic prose and found it incomprehensible. A piece of surrealist, revolutionary, satirical, crazy, half-mystical pamphleteering customary in unregulated, *maudite* café society (which flourished in England, too, in the eighteenth century) was imported to the United States by serious university intellectuals and transplanted into a subculture alien to its original home environment. (People don't "teach" Derrida in France.) As a serious contender for a serious place in academia it is, of course, laughable. It is much more adequate in slim booklets of avant-garde Manhattan publishers like Semiotext(e) or in little magazines like *Radical Philosophy* in England than in the Ivy League-style establishment where it was, justly and predictably, trampled.

G. M. TAMÁS
*E.L. Wiegand Visiting Professor
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.*

To the editors:

I wish to express dissent from Thomas Nagel's use of Alan Sokal's controversial article in *Social Text* as an opportunity to beat up on Thomas Kuhn and the social

constructivist approach to the history of science. Yes, social constructivism can be pushed to relativist extremes. But, without a degree of Kuhn-like social constructivism and moderate relativism, there is no history of science (or, similarly, of law) worth reading. The history of science just becomes a boring and insignificant listing of what scientists thought in the past.

NORMAN F. CANTOR
*Professor of History
 New York University
 New York, New York*

Left field

To the editors:

Jonathan Chait misses the mark in assessing the significance of Geoffrey Fieger's win in the Michigan Democratic primary race for governor ("Dead Man Walking," October 19). Chait argues that an old paleoliberal union vanguard continues to flex its muscle to endorse paleoliberal candidates while other Democrats dare not challenge the UAW's selection—unlike an enlightened "national party [that] has decided that its candidates ... must ... appeal to centrist, independent voters."

In truth, the Michigan Democratic voters (and arguably a majority of the electorate at large?) are anti-NAFTA and more paleoliberal than ever; disillusionment with mush-mouthed centrism led voters (including rank-and-file union members) to reject the UAW hierarchy's recent endorsements.

The extent of Michigan Democratic voters' disillusionment with neocon candidates is evident by the candidate they nominated. Attorney Geoffrey Fieger shed his media-saturated promotional tour and legal defense of Jack Kevorkian and replaced it with an overwrought appeal to populist sensibilities. Fieger's success in the primary is a testament to the continuing vitality and resilience of an electorate that wants a restoration of "paleoliberal" politics, an electorate that believes so firmly in the message that a startlingly large portion of the electorate is willing to overlook the oftentimes overbearing messenger.

ROBERT J. MACDONALD
Flint, Michigan

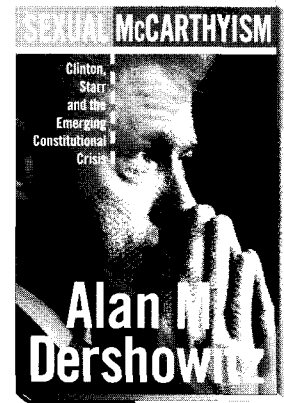
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FROM WASHINGTON

Inconceivable

Conservatives love to use unintended consequences to indict liberalism. Affirmative action has the unintended consequence of cheapening minority achievement; disability legislation has the unintended consequence of protecting addicts. When the unintended consequence is the opposite of the desired outcome—when, say, education reform causes schools to decline—conservatism knows bliss.

In October's chaotic omnibus budget wrap-up, Congress made one little-noticed decision whose unintended consequence is certain to be the reverse of the legislation's ostensible intent. This time, though, it happened mainly at the urging of conservatives. Congress zeroed out American support for the United Nations Population Fund, known, confusingly, as UNFPA. The reason was that UNFPA operates in China, which has a horrifying record on forced abortion and sterilization. But the result of the decision will be more abortions and sterilizations in China.

China began its infamous "one child" policy in 1979. Whatever you think of population-doomsday arguments—many of which seem progressively less convincing, even as human numbers continue to rise—China, which is almost out of arable land, had little choice but to attempt some degree of fertility constraint. But the one-child policy caused millions of coerced abortions; about a third of Chinese women are now sterile, owing to the ubiquitous, coerced implantation of ghastly steel-ring IUDs. Some peasant women were subjected, in government clinics, to lower-quality reproductive care than that which American livestock receives.

In 1981, UNFPA plunged into this mess by becoming one of the first outside agencies to operate in post-Mao China. From then until 1995, UNFPA spent \$157 million in China, mainly to encourage Chinese authorities to switch from the primitive steel-ring IUD to a copper-T unit that harms women less

and usually has a reversible effect. During this period, according to Steven Sinding, director of population science at the Rockefeller Foundation, UNFPA pressured Chinese officials to stop compelled abortions. "The UNFPA was part of the solution in China, not part of the problem," Sinding says. But, in order to stay in China, the agency did not aggressively denounce what was happening there. When word of Chinese forced abortions reached the West, UNFPA was tainted by association. From 1986 to 1993, Congress gave UNFPA no funding, citing the China program.

After Bill Clinton took office in 1993, funding resumed. In 1995, however, pressure from abortion opponents in Congress resulted in a two-year suspension of UNFPA's initiative in China. The agency spent this period negotiating with Beijing on a vastly improved pilot program under which birth restrictions would become voluntary. The new UNFPA effort began in 1997 and, according to a recent dispatch from Zhongguan by Liz Sly of the *Chicago Tribune*, does seem to be diminishing the coercive element of Chinese reproductive policy. Sly found that officials at clinics in the new UNFPA program are beginning to acknowledge women's rights to their childbearing decisions and that one-child zealotry is fading. That is to say, conservative congressional pressure recorded a success by helping push China toward humane family planning.

But that's not how UNFPA's new program has been received on the Hill. Republicans, notably Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey, have fought hard to cancel funding for UNFPA because it will not renounce abortion altogether. Smith has taken his share of lumps in the press, including in *TNR*. He has, for example, been too harshly depicted as an extremist for his advocacy of the "Mexico City" clause that would essentially forbid so much as discussion of abortion by U.S.-supported family-planning organizations overseas. But, if you believe abortion is morally wrong, why shouldn't you argue for restrictions?

The trouble is that Smith and others in the congressional pro-life caucus have lost track of the fact that introducing Western-standard contraception overseas will reduce the world's overall occurrence of abortion. Since Western contraception has become available in the former Soviet bloc, birth control use has shot up and abortion rates have fallen: Russia now has about a third fewer abortions annually than it did just

five years ago (see "Bad Ban," by Nurith C. Aizenman, June 15). It's unimaginable that any U.S. or U.N. action could cause China to outlaw abortions. But the introduction into China's bureaucratic culture of voluntary, woman-friendly forms of birth control will reduce the demand for abortion—which, since China now conducts more abortions than any other country, is the most pressing abortion objective worldwide.

Nevertheless, Smith and others in the House now treat UNFPA funding as an abortion litmus test. Last year, Congress authorized \$25 million for the agency, then held \$5 million back—the amount UNFPA spent in China. This year, in the last-minute omnibus swirl, UNFPA was

zeroed out without debate. Sadly, the final zeros were inserted by

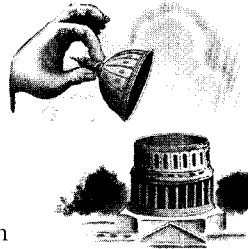
Representative David Obey of Wisconsin, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee. Obey, a thoughtful liberal who opposes abortion and who has long backed most U.N. causes, rejects UNFPA engagement with Beijing because, he said

in 1997, "in my view they have a coercive abortion program in China." This year, in budgetary backroom deal-cutting, Obey denounced the U.N. for sending its population teams back to China, causing political problems for U.N. supporters like him at the very time they were fighting for the United States to pay its back dues to the organization.

There are fair concerns about UNFPA. It is, after all, the agency that just appointed Geri Halliwell, the former Ginger Spice, as "goodwill ambassador." How very '90s: the airhead as figurehead. At least now U.S. tax money won't subsidize Ginger's wardrobe vans. But otherwise the unintended consequences of the UNFPA vote will be entirely negative. The essential fact about birth control is that it prevents the need for abortion. Withdrawal of American support for China's budding transition to voluntary family planning will both set back this highly desirable reform and lead to an additional 200,000 Chinese abortions per year, experts estimate.

If you were a Chinese woman contemplating your reproductive choices, would you want U.N. personnel around monitoring the situation or prefer to be in the hands of unsupervised, creepy Communist cadres? Put it another way. If any member of Congress had a wife traveling in China who needed obstetrical care, he'd take her to a UNFPA clinic—that's for sure.

GREGG EASTERBROOK



NOVEMBER 23, 1998

THE MODERATE REPUBLIC

Alfonse D'Amato's 18-year career in the Senate spans the entire recent epoch of conservative resurgence in American politics. You could even say D'Amato's career serves as a kind of barometer for the Republican right's political health. A buoyant and loyal member of the 1980 Reagan Revolution, D'Amato developed through two easy reelections into an entrenched and popular power broker in his home state—and a formidable chairman of the Senate Banking Committee. But, over time, D'Amato ran out of ideas. He led the Banking Committee on a Whitewater wild goose chase. His once-colorful persona gave way to behavior that was merely sloppy and erratic. By the time he ran into a credible and determined Democratic opponent, Charles Schumer, D'Amato was ripe for defeat. How ridiculous, yet how fitting, that D'Amato would wreck his own chances by calling Schumer a "putzhead" and then lying about it.

D'Amato's crushing defeat by Schumer is, in fact, emblematic of what's going on more broadly in both parties. The national Republican Party, dominated by strident conservatives, is losing its way and squandering its once-substantial purchase on mainstream public opinion. Meanwhile, centrist Democrats are on the rise. Yes, the Republicans do still control both houses of Congress, but that is a false indicator. More important is the fact that the Democrats gained five seats in the House in a midterm election during a Democratic president's second term. Nothing like this has happened in more than a century and a half. Republicans once spoke confidently not only of boosting their House majority by several dozen seats but also of attaining a filibuster-proof, 60-seat majority in the Senate. The latter goal, too, was not achieved.

Why did this happen? Obviously, the Republicans badly overplayed their hand in trying to exploit President Clinton's Bimbroglio disgrace. (Now will the GOP pursue its impeachment crusade to the bitter end?) But that misjudgment was really only a particular case of a more general mismatch between the party of Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey and the American public at large. These are good times in America. We are not just living through an extraordinary inflation-free economic expansion, which, last summer's stock-market jitters notwithstanding, has basically eliminated unemployment as a middle-class worry and has even begun to push up wages at the bottom of the income scale. We are also living through a time of remarkable social recovery, when the country

seems to be finding durable solutions to problems that were once thought intractable, such as teen pregnancy, violent crime, and even the spread of AIDS.

Reagan, and then Gingrich, came to power on waves of alarm, much of it justified, about the condition of the country. But, for most voters, these are no longer alarming times. Meanwhile, the problems that do concern American voters at the moment—the quality of their schools and health insurance, mainly—are contentious, but, basically, people believe they can be settled through discussion and compromise. These days, America is a moderate republic in search of moderate policies.

For all the president's patent character flaws, the Clinton-Gore administration has adapted to this reality, and so has its party. National Republicans, however, still seem to be trying to shoehorn reality into the dire worldview to which the Christian Coalition and other key constituencies of their party are so committed. Hence, the Democrats won the middle-class vote by four percentage points this year; in 1994, the Republicans won by eight.

In a moderate republic, moderate Republicans have the brightest future. That is the lesson of the one sign of Republican strength from November 3—their continued control over 60 percent of America's governorships, including those of eight of the nine most populous states. Democrat Gray Davis's win in California is the exception that proves the rule. He won on a platform (including a form of capital gains tax cuts) that positioned him just inches to the left of his Republican opponent, Dan Lungren. In the intraparty battle for power that is likely to ensue among Republicans now, moderates hold the balance of power. This is true on Capitol Hill, where Gingrich and Armey might tack toward the center to survive an attack on their leadership by those Republicans who believe that the party failed because it wasn't conservative enough. And it is true on the road to 2000, where the party would basically be crazy not to nominate one of its "compassionate conservative" governors, like George W. Bush of Texas.

But those are problems for the Republicans to sort out. For the rest of us, this is an occasion, if not to celebrate, then certainly to reflect happily on the common sense of the American electorate. This was a vote by people who are very much in touch with America's encouraging economic, social, and political reality against a party led by politicians who, it seems, are not. •



ELECTION NOTEBOOK

REPUBLICAN SHAMELESSNESS WATCH: As the returns rolled in, we found ourselves leafing through House Speaker Newt Gingrich's book *Lessons Learned the Hard Way*. There, the self-described "slow learner" notes: "It is always dangerous to try to impose your will on reality because reality has a terrible way of biting back." Indeed. Having vowed, back in April, that, as Speaker, he would "never again . . . make a speech without commenting on" Bimbroglio, Newt Gingrich took to the airwaves Tuesday night and repeatedly disavowed the last-minute, \$10 million scandal-oriented ad campaign that ran in 30 congressional districts—a campaign, readers may recall, that he personally approved. Upon learning that the 250-member Republican majority he predicted as late as mid-September hadn't exactly materialized, the man who orchestrated the House Judiciary Committee's release of Ken Starr's steamy report explained on CNN, "The news media was vastly more fixated on the president and the investigation than the Congress was." And, "I didn't give a single speech in the last two months where we talked about anything except basic issues to modern Americans. . . . But you couldn't penetrate the news media." House Majority Leader Dick Armey, who, like Gingrich, was famously reluctant to engage in scandal-mongering when there was so much *real* work to be done, tried to blame the whole mess on Janet Reno for allowing the Starr investigation to go forward in the first place! "It's been very difficult to get a serious message out in America today when the whole country has been really obsessing over the president's antics in the White House," he complained on "Nightline." From now on, maybe these guys should have to take an oath before speaking to the American people.

LADIES' NIGHT: In an election that brought a bouquet of happy results for Democrats, here's one that might be overlooked or misinterpreted: You don't need a Year of the Woman to elect women. Of the three female senators elected in 1992—Patty Murray of Washington, Barbara Boxer of California, and Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois—the two who could plausibly run on their merits this time around won, and the one who could not, did not. According to the mildly condescending conventional wisdom of six years ago, all three women were supposed to have been elected because, in essence, they were women. They made convenient symbols for soccer-mom disgust with lechery in the workplace and the like. But this November's results suggest that voters (as opposed to pundits) may have a more egalitarian and complicated take. Moseley-Braun had serious strikes against her: an IRS investigation of her tax liability, questions about her campaign financing, and the visit she made to Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha in 1996. Murray and Boxer did not have particularly stellar legislative records, it's true; but neither of them

had done anything especially corrupt or embarrassing, and both were running against Republicans who struck their West Coast constituents as too close to the right edge of the political spectrum. Basically, the results of these three races establish the principle that a not-too-undistinguished incumbent female senator has the same right to retain her seat against an opponent who is out of step with the voters that a mediocre male incumbent would have had. That's progress.

MASS MOVEMENTS: Democrat-friendly Massachusetts was particularly good to Democrats this year, for many popular Republicans—even some interesting ones—went down to defeat. But, even in such a favorable climate, Scott Harshbarger, trying for promotion from attorney general to governor, couldn't unseat Republican Paul Cellucci, who has held the statehouse ever since his predecessor, the cerebral aristocrat Bill Weld, got bored and persuaded President Clinton to appoint him as ambassador to Mexico, where Senator Jesse Helms refused to send him. Cellucci is not known for especially acute mental gifts, and Harshbarger wears Harvard on his sweatshirt. Still, it was the challenger who seemed out of his depth. The only time he was equal to the incumbent was in an especially ugly TV confrontation. Senator John Kerry, who has big ambitions for 2000, demonstrated how little his enthusiastic support for Harshbarger mattered; so did Ted Kennedy. Harshbarger had mobilized the unions and organized an expensive last-ditch telephone campaign. The pundits and pollsters began to say that his hour would dawn. It didn't. Maybe Harshbarger reminded voters too much of the last Democratic governor, Michael Dukakis, whose high-minded tedium Harshbarger evoked. And, if "it's the economy, stupid," Massachusetts under Cellucci is experiencing a "miracle" that seems both wider and deeper than the one Dukakis supposedly wrought. In any event, the real Democratic star may be the new representative from the eighth congressional district, which was represented not only by young Joe Kennedy but also by his uncle Jack and, after him, Tip O'Neill. It's Michael E. Capuano, mayor of Somerville, who might, like his predecessors, have vaunting aspirations but who right now seems to be a down-to-earth politician with a practical, moderate Democratic agenda.

DEPARTMENT OF GOOD RACIAL NEWS: After the Supreme Court ruled in 1996 that drawing legislative districts along racial lines can be unconstitutional, *The New York Times* lamented that, a century hence, Americans would reflect on the holding "with regret and even shame." And Congressman Mel Watt of North Carolina, one of the black representatives whose "majority-minority" district was thrown into jeopardy, had warned, "Without these districts, you're not going to have minority representation in Congress. It's just that simple." So who was that Democrat winning in the remnants of Watt's old district? Why, none other than Mel Watt, who

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secured a 56 percent majority in a district that is now 34 percent black (and 55 percent Democratic). Of course, this is old hat. In November 1996, five black incumbents originally elected in specially drawn black-majority districts won reelection in newly drawn majority-white districts. Once again, the voters have shown that skin color alone does not determine how modern Americans cast their votes, which is something to reflect on without regret—and with some pride.

DEPARTMENT OF BAD RACIAL NEWS: Basically, we're content that Maryland Governor Parris Glendening won his bid for reelection against Republican Ellen Sauerbrey, mainly because even this lackluster incumbent was preferable to his hard-right challenger. Still, sometimes the right people win for the wrong reasons. And, in this case, Glendening widened his margin of victory by resorting to a particularly dishonorable tactic: race-baiting. The ploy took the form of television spots and speeches accusing Sauerbrey, in veiled terms, of racism—as evidenced by her opposition to such measures as a bill to preserve Maryland's minority contracting program, a hate-crime bill, and a 1992 civil rights bill. To be sure, Sauerbrey *did* oppose minority contracting (which is no sin, anyway, since that's one of the most dubious forms of affirmative action). But the other charges were totally misleading. One of Glendening's commercials showed a mural of Africa while condemning Sauerbrey's vote against the hate-crime bill—which dealt only with sexual orientation. As for the 1992 civil rights bill, plenty of Democrats opposed it, too. It was ultimately killed by the Democratic state Senate, and Governor Glendening never sought to revive it. Several of Maryland's leading African Americans—including Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke—denounced the ads. Nonetheless, the damage was done. In the weeks after he began airing the ads, Glendening, who'd been running neck and neck with Sauerbrey, finally pulled ahead—thanks to the support of previously indifferent minority voters. This short-run gain to the governor may come at some cost to the racial atmosphere in his state.

DEPARTMENT OF EVEN WORSE RACIAL NEWS: It's been a year of racially charged symbolic politics in South Carolina. First, Governor David Beasley proposed removing the Confederate flag from the state capitol dome in Columbia, inspiring the ire of the powerful South Carolina Republican right. Beasley later waffled, which only compounded his problems, and Democrat Jim Hodges defeated him. In this climate, progressive-minded South Carolinians succeeded in getting a referendum on the ballot to repeal the state's constitutional provision banning interracial marriage—or, to be exact, "marriage of a white person with a Negro or mulatto or a person who shall have one-eighth or more of Negro blood." The clause is, of course, a dead letter, and has been ever since 1967, when the Supreme Court found

anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. But the referendum was nonetheless significant, for it set up a kind of racial ink-blot test: What would happen if you gave citizens in the cradle of the Confederacy an opportunity to vote *by secret ballot* on this sensitive issue? Turns out that 62 percent of South Carolinians voted to permit interracial marriage, and 38 percent voted to keep it illegal. Thirty-eight percent! How to interpret this result? Taking the long view, we suppose it's some measure of racial progress that such a referendum could pass at all in South Carolina just 30-odd years since the Voting Rights Act. Also, older voters and Christian conservatives, those most likely to oppose intermarriage, were somewhat overrepresented among those who voted on Tuesday. Furthermore, though some 45 percent of all white Americans surveyed in 1994 said that they "approve" of intermarriage—an all-time high—most still express some reservations about it, and 16 percent would ban it. This attitudinal flux is going on at a time when the number of black-white marriages remains tiny but is increasing rapidly. Still, if you are one of those couples, the unsettling lesson of South Carolina's vote would seem to be this: You'll face some amount of ambivalence or hostility from many of your neighbors wherever you choose to live, but, in South Carolina, you now have a rough idea of *how many*. And that number is still greater than one would have hoped or expected at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

WE TOLD YOU SO: Stop thinking about Ken Starr for a moment. Back in our February 2 issue, TNR's David Grann documented in detail how Donald Smaltz, the independent counsel investigating former Agriculture Secretary Michael Espy, pushed the law deeper and more dangerously into the realm of politics and trampled on the rights of ordinary citizens—all in an effort to prove Espy had taken \$35,000 worth of gifts from lobbyists (see "Prosecutorial Indiscretion"). Now, Smaltz's main witness has essentially confirmed this. According to *The Washington Post*, Richard Douglas, a lobbyist and friend of Espy, unexpectedly attacked Smaltz in the middle of his cross-examination in court this week, despite a previous arrangement with the prosecution. In an outburst, Douglas told the jury that Smaltz had used three years of "storm trooper" tactics to turn him into a "puppet" of the prosecution. "God knows, if I had thirty million dollars, I could find dirt on you, sir," he snapped. Potentially even more damaging to the independent counsel, the Supreme Court announced on Monday it would review Smaltz's radical interpretation of the gratuities statute, which a lower court earlier this year struck down as unconstitutional. Under the Smaltz Standard, a person would be prohibited from giving "anything of value" to a federal official—no matter the intent. In other words, there need be no quid for the quo. A cup of coffee or piece of cheesecake would constitute bribery—and almost all legislators in Washington would be turned into lawbreakers overnight. Now you can go back to thinking about Ken Starr. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

IT'S A RAP

By Dana Milbank

On the day before the election, President Clinton strutted into the East Room with a spring in his step, a song in his heart, and a wag in his finger. Yes, the finger wag was back. I had assumed that this gesture had pretty much lost its usefulness as an expression of moral sincerity, given that Clinton employed it in January to tell the country that he had not had sexual relations with that woman. In fact, Republicans had been using footage of the famous finger wag in their TV ads during the last week of the election.

But there was Clinton on Monday, wagging the First Finger as he hammered the Republicans on the patients' bill of rights—and getting away with it. “You should not have a system where you get in trouble for taking care of people,” the president vowed. Somehow, he has reclaimed the finger wag, just as he has fast been reclaiming his political authority, despite all predictions to the contrary. The next day's election results would confirm it: Clinton had outwitted the hapless GOP yet again.

Hence, the song in his heart. The lyrics came midway through Monday's campaign-style speech on HMO reform:

We can have progress on health and a patients' bill of rights.
Or more partisanship.
Progress on education and students in smaller, more modern classrooms rather than trailers.
Or more partisanship.
Progress towards saving Social Security for the twenty-first century.
Or more partisanship.

It wasn't much of a riff. But the president's debut in rhythmic verse must be understood in this fall's wider politico-musical context. Vice President Gore, who emerged as the Democrats' top campaigner this fall while Clinton hid in the White House, turned himself into a veritable hip-hop artist. Each speech had a section that his aides call “the rap,” performed with ever-improving cadence:

We say, “legislate”; the Republicans say, “investigate.”
We say, “educate”; they say, “instigate.”
We say, “illuminate”; they say, “interrogate.”
We say, “protect our children”; they launch more inquisitions.
We say, “make the decisions”; they take depositions.
We know our future is nearing; they hold more hearings.
We say, “heal our nation”; they just say, “investigation.”

Like any rap artist, Gore massaged his rhymes in between performances. Noticing that the line about “children” and “inquisitions” didn't quite work, he substituted new raps at subsequent performances:

We say, “unify”; they say, “vilify.”
We want to help the sick; they're playing partisan tricks.

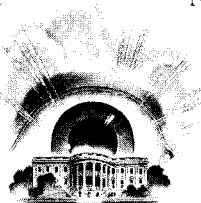
“He's the chemist,” one of his aides said. “The Alchemist.” By last weekend, Grandmaster Al had even ordered his rap translated into Spanish for a concert he was giving in the Bronx. (“Ellos dicen ‘investigación’; nosotros decimos ‘inspiración.’”) Late in the campaign, I suggested to Fresh Prince Albert that he do his entire speech in rap. Here's what I had in mind:

We say, “no more gay attacks”; Lott says, “kleptomaniacs.”
We save Social Security; they plot right-wing conspiracy.
We fix Medicare's trouble; they lock up poor Webb Hubbell.

For reasons that are still unclear, Gore did not take my advice. The danger, I suppose, was that the rap could have taken over Gore's life. (Gore after work: “I say, ‘I'm a winner’; Tipper says, ‘Eat your dinner.’”) Still, there's reason to believe Clinton and Gore would benefit from the use of hip-hop in their official business. Those who wonder why Republicans folded in the budget talks obviously didn't hear Clinton's threat to Newt Gingrich: “Surrender to my demands, or I'll leave you in Blumenthal's hands.” Saddam Hussein, likewise, could be restrained by the use of hard-line, easy-rhyme diplomacy: “You keep on making poison gas; I'll send a cruise missile up your ... way.”

The Clinton-Gore rap is part of what one White House aide calls “political jujitsu,” the act of using an opponent's superior strength against him—in this case, using the scandal against the Republicans. Jujitsu is the main reason for the Democrats' strong showing on Election Day. Clinton and the Democrats found a way in this hostile election season to use the president's scandal—a potentially fatal weakness—to their benefit. Clinton's Monday event on the patients' bill of rights was typical jujitsu. The president stood alongside a chart comparing the Republican and Democratic plans. I couldn't make out the fine print from where I stood, but, under the Republican plan, the chart clearly read “NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO” and, under the Democratic plan, it read “YES YES YES YES YES YES.” “This has nothing to do, ordinarily, with partisan politics,” said Clinton, who underscored the nonpartisan nature of the event by holding it the day before the election.

Inside the White House, aides busily lowered pre-election expectations. On Monday, spinners were setting expectations so low that virtually any outcome would have represented a victory. One suggested that victory could be declared on anything better than the typical 27-seat loss in the House for the president's party in midterm elections. Earlier, I had heard the typical loss put at 34. “Depending on what year you go back to, you can get it all the way up to thirty-eight,” one of Clinton's senior advisers said. Like everyone else,



White House officials really expected Democratic losses of ten to twelve seats in the House. At the senior staff meeting, Chief of Staff John Podesta and other top aides reminded staffers that the Democrats were "going against history" and fighting "uphill." But the spin was already in place: "If the Republicans are supposed to pick up twenty-seven, and they pick up less than ten, they're paying a penalty for not having a message," the official said.

Before the results came in, the White House was buoyed by two last-minute polls showing a Democratic advantage, but heavy Republican spending in the last days of the campaign was sure to hurt. And the negative ads were actually increasing the number of undecided voters in the last days. "It injects volatility at the end, which makes everybody here nervous because we don't know which way it's going to break," one senior Clinton aide said. The stakes were higher because the punditry would interpret the results as a referendum on the scandal. This was false, but inevitable, and therefore a better-than-expected showing by Democrats would help to quiet the chattering class on impeachment. "What we'll say is they wanted it to be dominated by scandal but it was dominated by issues," one senior White House official said on Monday, rehearsing the spin.

By four o'clock Tuesday afternoon, the early exit polls were bringing unexpectedly good news. "Cautiously optimistic is where you could put me for now," said one White House poll-watcher in the afternoon. African American turnout appeared high, particularly in the East. The network exit polls brought more good news for Democrats: their Senate candidates were leading close races in New York, California, North Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin. The returns were so good, in fact, that the White House decided to decline all requests for TV interviews. "You don't have to spin good news," one adviser said. And, if the early polling proved wrong, White House aides wouldn't wind up red-faced.

For the next several hours, White House staffers shared rumors and nervous energy. "Man, it's just tense," said one of Clinton's top advisers. Aides were pacing the halls and asking for gossip—"What do you hear? How's it going?"—often having their own speculation parroted back as hard fact ten minutes later. The White House went into a brief panic when a false rumor spread that NBC's exit poll had inaccurately favored the Democrats. Craig Smith, the White House political director, broke the tension by going out for a haircut. Paul Begala distracted himself by searching for talking points on the midterm election of 1822—the last time a president's party gained seats in the sixth year. Hillary Clinton—who would later savor the demise of her two persecutors, Al D'Amato and Lauch Faircloth—went to watch Oprah Winfrey's *Beloved* in the White House theater.

By half past six that evening, the Democrats' Senate exit polls were holding up. Only Carol Moseley-Braun in Illinois was losing her Senate reelection race. There

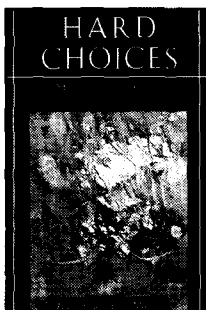
was no polling on the House races, but Clinton's political hands figured the trends would hold. Peripheral aides went off to election-night parties—lawyers to one home, speechwriters to another—but top political advisers settled in for a long night. Clinton gathered with political hands in Podesta's office, eating pizza (unclear who delivered it this time) and tracking returns on the Internet.

Union bosses John Sweeney and Gerald McEntee joined the Clintonites for the night. Clinton checked the results over Smith's shoulder. By around nine o'clock, it became clear the exit polls were no fluke. When the announcement came of Chuck Schumer's victory in New York, the place broke into applause. At another party for White House staffers, the crowd went wild when CNN announced D'Amato's defeat, while loyalists were speechless when an anchor predicted, wrongly, that the Democrats might take back the House. "It seemed anything was possible," said one celebrator. "It seemed even Moseley-Braun might win." It wasn't, and she didn't, but that hardly mattered. By the time aides began to filter out of the White House at midnight, it was clear the Democrats would hold their own in the Senate and might even pick up three or four seats in the House.

By Wednesday morning, Democratic gains were up to five House seats, better than anyone had imagined. Moderates will hold the balance of power in the evenly divided House, making it less likely conservative Republicans will get very far with impeachment. Speaker Newt Gingrich, who once predicted Republican gains of 40 seats, and House Majority Leader Dick Armey will face recriminations and possibly a leadership challenge. Meanwhile, Clinton-style New Democrats, a centrist group in the House, held every one of their 41 incumbents while expanding their ranks by another ten members.

More importantly, the Democrats' strong showing should put to rest the talk over the last couple of months about a crippled presidency. Even before the election, Clinton had put together one of his best months in office, clinching the Wye agreement, forcing a Republican retreat in budget talks, striking a deal in Kosovo, and persuading the world to adopt American policy on the IMF. Said one gleeful Clinton adviser: "After the budget, the president's critics said, 'All right, but can he fly?' After Wye, they said, 'All right, he can fly, but can he walk on water?' And, when he walks on water, they'll say, 'OK, he knew where the stones were.'" Jim Borgman, cartoonist for *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, drew the best cartoon of the season a few weeks back, picturing a handcuffed and tied Clinton, locked in a safe, weighted under water, and buried in concrete, with elephants standing on top. In the last frame, an unharmed Clinton appears, saying to the nonplussed elephants: "He doesn't stand a chance this time!" That's about how things must look to Republicans right now. The past month made it clear Clinton will survive. Tuesday night raised the possibility Clinton will thrive. •

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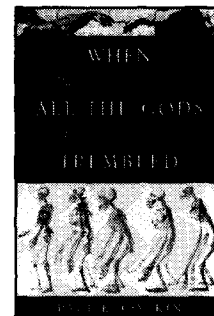
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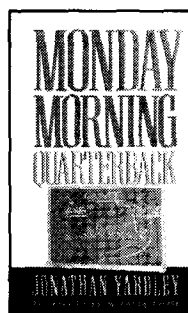
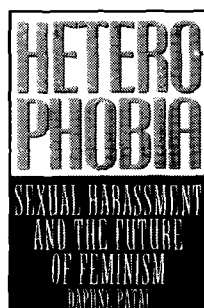
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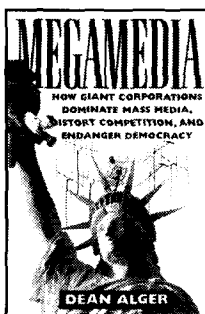
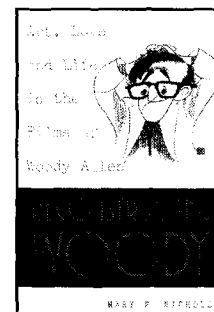
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FUSSY RUSS

By Peter Beinart

It was one of the few campaigns in this tawdry election season that had the feel of a crusade. Wisconsin Senator Russell Feingold, Democratic architect of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill, turned his reelection bid into an experiment in clean politics. He set himself a one-dollar-per-voter spending limit, he raised three-quarters of his money in-state, and he refused to air attack ads. When the Democratic Party ran commercials against his opponent, Feingold forced them off the air. "I am happy," he said, "to risk my seat in the name of trying to change what I believe to be a completely corrupted system." Madison's *Capital Times* said a Feingold victory would "begin the process of reclaiming American democracy for the people." *USA Today* warned that a Feingold loss would mean "Halloween all year long."

On Tuesday, November 3, Feingold won. The reaction from editorialists across the country has been jubilation—eagerly awaited proof that voters can be rallied against the evils of big money. Yet the evidence is not quite so reassuring. While other Democrats were surging, Feingold, by running on campaign finance, turned a 20-point, late-summer lead into a two-point victory. And this near-collapse hints at the dangers of liberalism's current preoccupation with process.

Historically, the fight against electoral corruption has drawn meaning from its connection to a broader critique of the unfairness in American society. Yet, in this era of liberal confusion about economic policy, the quest for political reform often becomes an end in itself. Feingold staked his fate on distinctions between honest and dishonest fund-raising that struck many voters as arbitrary and abstract. And it quite nearly did him in.

Feingold developed his good-government image when he first ran for the Senate six years ago. Facing two better-financed and better-known opponents in the Democratic primary, he languished for much of the campaign in third place. But then his primary opponents turned ferociously on each other, filling the airwaves with negative attacks. Feingold capitalized on voter disgust, running ads in which he proclaimed, "I refuse to stoop to this level," as he ducked heaps of flying mud.

In the general election, when incumbent Robert Kasten tried to define him as too liberal, Feingold again turned attention toward his opponent's negativity. He ran a homey, witty campaign based upon a list of promises posted to his garage door: that he would keep his primary residence in Wisconsin, that he would visit each county every year, that he would not miss a vote, that he would refuse a pay raise, and that he would finance his campaigns with in-state money. Notably, not one of these pledges dealt with an actual policy issue.

Feingold's reelection campaign was modeled on his 1992 bid. But this year he faced Congressman Mark Neumann, an

opponent more adept at framing issues for public consumption. The national media often portrayed the race as a battle between Feingold's idealism and Neumann's money-drenched ruthlessness. But, in reality, Feingold was facing a true believer like himself. The difference was that, while Feingold's idealism centered on campaign finance, Neumann's focused on fiscal policy. Neumann had run for the House in 1994 because he



RUSSELL FEINGOLD BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

believed the budget deficit was leading the country "toward disaster." Once elected, he tormented his party's leaders, accusing them of betrayal whenever they gave tax cuts higher priority than deficit reduction. In the process, he earned the wrath of Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page—and became a hero to his colleagues in the Republican freshman class.

In his race for the Senate, Neumann assumed that, if he could define issues to his advantage, voters would not care where he got his money. He relentlessly attacked Feingold's record on government spending, "partial birth" abortion, and Social Security. Rather than raising and spending the money necessary to respond, Feingold gambled that voters impressed with his integrity would disregard the attacks. Even when Feingold finally did run ads, he devoted several of them to the meta-issue his refusal to take soft money or go negative. He barely broached core Democratic themes like education and regulation of HMOs even though his legislative record on those issues was strong. Two weeks before Election Day, polls showed that voters trusted Neumann more on Social Security, an issue on which Democrats usually clean up.

Feingold did convince voters that he was running the more honorable race, but exit polls showed that few voters made that the criterion for their vote. And it is not clear why they should have. Feingold centered his outrage on Neumann's soft money, a regulatory distinction that bore little connection to people's lives. And those negative Democratic Party ads he forced off the air? They attacked Neumann on Medicare, education, and the environment—legitimate issues, and the very ones that Feingold needed to link to political reform in order to make it seem relevant.

For his part, Neumann disdained Feingold's effort to turn the race into a referendum on campaign finance, and, while his view was self-serving, it was probably also sincere. Neumann believed that the ends he was pursuing mattered more than the purity of his campaign. And in that belief he had good company. Minnesota's Paul Wellstone, a reformer like Feingold, nonetheless used the power of his office to hugely out-fund-raise his opponent in his 1996 reelection bid. He aggressively solicited money from traditionally Democratic sources and attacked his opponent's support from tobacco companies and HMOs, saying they already had enough representation in Washington. Wellstone's issues-oriented populism brought him a much larger victory than did Feingold's process populism. And it is probably only because Feingold turned his emphasis from campaign finance in the final days that he won at all. In the election's last two weeks, Feingold finally began to go after Neumann on Social Security—and managed to sway voter opinion on the issue.

Feingold frequently invoked the saint of Wisconsin progressivism, Robert La Follette, as the model for his

campaign. But, unlike Feingold, La Follette was a pragmatist on process and a hard-liner on policy. Under his governorship in 1904, Wisconsin became the first state to directly elect its senators, and La Follette also championed the right of initiative and referendum. But he saw those reforms as part of a larger effort to assert public control over corporate power, proclaiming that "you cannot yoke private monopoly with honest, impartial public service." In his battle against the railroad-backed political machine that had stymied regulation in Wisconsin, La Follette even developed a machine of his own. To reformers' distress, he aggressively dished out patronage jobs to his supporters. But that patronage created the political base that allowed La Follette to enact his progressive agenda.

In his book *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter contrasts progressives like La Follette with the Mugwumps of the late nineteenth century, who also denounced political corruption but avoided the great economic struggles of the day. The Feingold campaign, though widely hailed, veered perilously close to a kind of modern-day Mugwumpery. The model holds some allure for a Democratic Party with an increasingly upscale constituency and a lack of confidence in government's ability to effectively intervene in the market. But ultimately it is an arid and aloof politics—an escape from the grittier problems that immediately affect people's lives. It is only in addressing those problems that liberals will kindle the passion for political reform that Russell Feingold sought to ignite in his reelection campaign this fall. •

ON THE HILL

MONEY MAN

By Jonathan Chait

Mitch McConnell has often postulated that nobody wins elections by advocating campaign finance reform. So, when this year's campaign promised to test his theory, he made sure the conditions were just right. As the chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, McConnell commanded a vast trove of soft money to distribute among the Republican Senate candidates of his choosing. And, as he picked winners and losers, it became clear that his choices were not guided solely by the strategic needs of the GOP but also by a desire to punish reform advocates. After Republican reform crusader Linda Smith defeated a primary candidate whom McConnell himself had recruited, she received only token support from him. Instead, McConnell poured

millions into an effort to defeat his pro-reform nemesis, Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin. Publicly, McConnell denied waging a vendetta, but not too convincingly. (Nice little campaign you've got there. Shame if anything were to happen to it.) In private, McConnell let it be known Feingold was "dead meat."

But McConnell could not knock off Feingold; worse still, he failed to gain any Senate seats for his party. Suddenly, he does not appear so intimidating. At a press conference Wednesday morning, in the election's wake, a reporter asked about campaign finance reform. McConnell pressed his lips in a tight, nervous smile. "So many of you who are interested in that issue have tried to create it into an election issue," he intoned bloodlessly. He explained that his choice of spending priorities was unaffected by such policy matters. It "was strictly based on polling data."

Until relatively recently, McConnell was a lonely Senate crank distinguished mainly by his visceral hatred for campaign finance reform. But, for the past year, McConnell and his views have been gloriously ascendant, shaping the GOP's legislative and political strategy. The congressional elections were to be his crowning triumph, irrefutable proof of the blunt invincibility of his brand of politics. Instead, they exposed its limitations. And soon it may be McConnell's career that's in jeopardy.

While McConnell's beliefs about money and politics do not differ radically from those of traditional Republicans, they are distinctive for their machine-like certainty. McConnell is a campaign finance determinist; to him, politics is simply a function of fund-raising. He seems to believe, as William Seward put it last century, that "a party is in one sense a joint stock company in which those who contribute the most direct the action and management of the concern." Oddly enough, McConnell's reformist enemies believe exactly the same thing—the difference being that the goo-goos consider this state of affairs abhorrent.

One can readily discern McConnell's philosophy from his formative experiences. "My ambition has always been for twenty years to be the senator from Kentucky," he told *National Journal* when he was first elected in 1984. To prepare for that day, he served as student-council president in high school, college, and law school and as an intern in the Senate. His political rise owes much to his prodigious fund-raising skills. McConnell is considered the father of the modern Republican Party in Kentucky, and he has remarked that he owes his success to his bulging war chest.

To hear McConnell tell it, though, his ardor on the subject of money in politics derives from his days as a law professor at night school in Louisville. In 1976, the Supreme Court ruled that political spending constituted a form of political speech, and, from this, McConnell has drawn the lesson that, according to the Constitution, fund-raising is not merely a necessity but also a moral good. In his public remarks, he portrays

himself as a free speech absolutist, touting his agreement with the American Civil Liberties Union and invoking the First Amendment in rapturous tones. "You're a practitioner of the First Amendment of the Constitution," he told a gathering of GOP donors last year. Because McConnell is so unabashedly against campaign finance reform, even his foes often concede the sincerity of his convictions.

Of course, revelations such as the one McConnell claims to have experienced typically come as a blinding flash of insight. Yet, in his case, epiphany took a while to set in. In 1990, McConnell was the leading advocate of a constitutional amendment to ban the burning of the American flag. (Later, when he grew more prominent in his role as campaign finance free speech defender, he switched positions on this issue.) The same year, he put forth legislation to restrict political activities by labor unions, curtail out-of-state spending, and ban political action committees—all forms of political speech that benefited Democrats. Two years later, he sponsored a bill allowing victims of sex crimes to sue publishers of pornography, which endeared him to radical-feminist anti-smut crusaders like Catharine MacKinnon, but horrified civil libertarians.

Oddly enough, McConnell's Republican colleagues, who did not previously betray many signs of civil libertarian zeal, seem to have undergone a similar transformation in the past year. While Republicans once mouthed support for campaign reform, now they fill the Capitol with mellifluous paeans to the First Amendment. If legal theory alone did not persuade them, they also had a less exalted inducement: "If we can stop [reform]," McConnell vowed, "we can control this institution for twenty years."

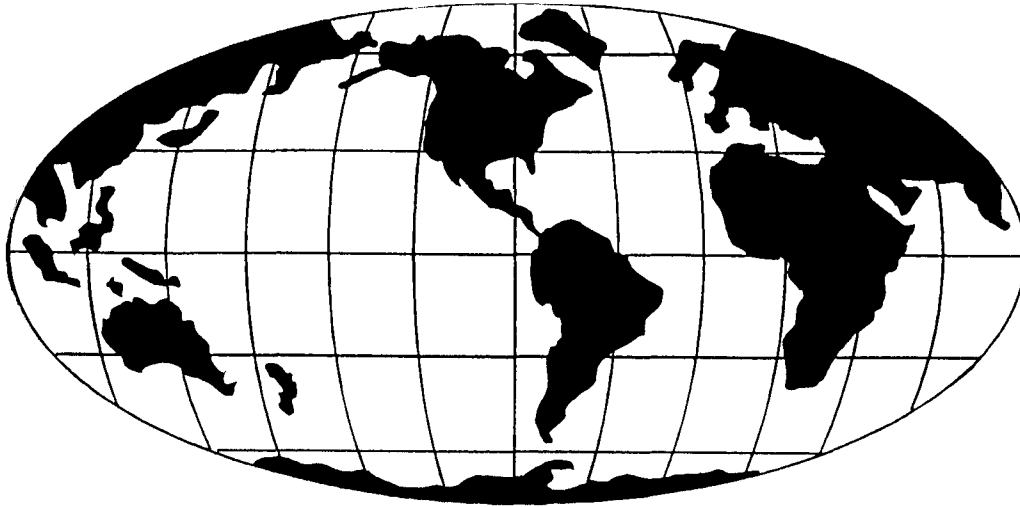
McConnell promised a virtuous circle: The GOP turns its political power into money, and then it turns its money into more political power. To a party still scarred from years of minority status on the Hill, his syllogism had an almost hypnotic allure. After all, the Republicans had half again more to spend than the Democrats. And so the congressional Republicans embraced McConnell's logic to the virtual exclusion of all other considerations.

It began with campaign finance reform itself. When popular GOP Senator John McCain cosponsored the main reform bill in Congress, it was not clear that Republicans could afford the political cost of voting it down. McConnell persuaded his colleagues that voters did not care, and, even if they did, the partisan benefits of the current system overwhelmed any popular backlash.

McConnell's thinking also carried the day on major legislative fights. Early in the year, a popular bill to tax tobacco passed a Senate committee overwhelmingly. *Time* reports that McConnell (who was also out to protect home-state tobacco farmers) ultimately persuaded Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott to oppose it, promising that the tobacco industry would spend millions to defend any senators forced to defend an unpopular



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vote. Most politicians would find this revelation embarrassing, but McConnell told *The Cincinnati Enquirer* that *Time*'s report was "the most accurate assessment of the politics of the defeat of the tobacco bill in the Senate, which I was in up to my you-know-what." Republicans used the same logic in blocking Democratic plans to regulate HMOs—they assumed donations from the health care industry would compensate for any political heat.

Usually, McConnellism has pushed Congress further to the right. But sometimes it has had the opposite effect. While negotiating over the federal budget with President Clinton this fall, Republicans decided to compromise, believing that they did not need tax or spending cuts in order to justify their election. They decided instead to rely on their huge money advantage. Christopher Shays, a frustrated Republican who cosponsored a campaign reform bill in the House, describes the leadership's position as "let's raise as much money as we can because we're going to spend more and put our spin on what took place."

It didn't quite work out that way. Today, the GOP legislative agenda lies in shambles. Republicans have boosted spending and failed to cut taxes. All this was permitted in the ostensible service of a November victory that never materialized. Now, Republicans may turn on their false messiah. "McConnell's 'we can buy the election' strategy failed," says a Senate aide. "There's rumbling behind the scenes about what to do about it."

Reformers claimed that the public would one day rise up in moral indignation against McConnell's brand of politics. Nobody predicted that it would fail on its own terms. His view of the world has turned out to be a great, cynical mistake. Money can wield great influence over politics—but, as Mitch McConnell and his experiment have shown, it has not yet replaced it. •

WASHINGTON SCENE

FREEPERS CREEPERS

By Ryan Lizza

"**Y**ou know the people that have been following the president everywhere he goes? They are our people," Jim Robinson tells me over the phone from his Fresno, California, home. It is Thursday, October 29, the night before Robinson is to meet several thousand of his "people" in Washington, D.C., where they will converge at the Washington Monument—on Halloween—to stage their biggest rally yet in support of ousting the president from office. Robinson, a 53-year-old Vietnam vet confined to a

wheelchair, is the founder of the right-wing website "Free Republic" (www.freerepublic.com), which in the last two years has blossomed into a 14,000-member discussion group that has become the epicenter of the minority movement calling for the president's impeachment.

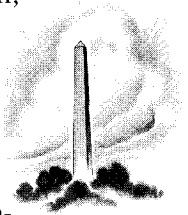
"Freepers"—as the site's members call themselves—don't think that Clinton's actions in Bimbroglia are the real crime. To many of them, President Clinton is the godfather of a vast criminal enterprise that goes far beyond sex in the Oval Office. Robinson, for one, believes that Clinton has committed treason by selling military secrets to the Communist Chinese. One of the site's most popular sections is the "Clinton Body Count," a list of dozens of deaths Freepers believe are in some way connected to the president. The list includes former Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who died in a plane crash over the Balkans; Washington reporter Sandy Hume, who committed suicide earlier this year; and Mary Mahoney, a former White House intern who was shot and killed during a robbery at a Starbucks in Georgetown. And then there is the other looming concern: Bill and Hillary Clinton might use the year 2000 computer bug as an excuse to declare martial law and remain indefinitely in office.

I began logging on to "Free Republic" a few weeks ago, as Freepers were organizing their Washington rally. Among those slated to join in were New York literary agent Lucianne Goldberg, House impeachment commander Bob Barr, presidential candidate Alan Keyes, and former Clinton bodyguard L.D. Brown. On Friday night, thousands of Freepers began pouring into Washington from as far away as Texas, California, and Florida. Many met in the lobby of a downtown Howard Johnson's, where they were greeted by Matt Drudge and Goldberg.

I struck up a conversation with Gene McDonald, a Freeper from Boca Raton. "You know Jane Doe Number Five?" he asked me, referring to a woman dug up by Paula Jones's lawyers. I told him I didn't. "Everyone in this room can tell you who it is," he assured me, pulling aside four Freepers to illustrate his point. None could come up with her name. "I don't pay much attention to the sex," a Freeper named Paul explained. "It's not sex; it's rape!" Gene shot back.

I wandered over to interview Connie Hair, Free Republic's spokeswoman. Why, I asked, don't the polls reflect the sense of antipathy toward Clinton that Freepers seem to feel? Simple, Hair replied, the polls are wrong. Pollsters are calling only unemployed people in cities, "people who are more inclined to be a part of the liberal agenda because they do not work for a living."

I asked about Freeper allegations that Clinton is behind the murder of Mary Mahoney at Starbucks. "The common belief on this site is not that Bill Clinton picked up a phone and said, 'Shoot this woman,'" she told me. "But he surrounds himself with criminals who of their own conviction take care of it for him. It is an entire mafia." I began to ask about the Clintons' seizing of



power with the Y2K bug, when Hair interrupted: "Right, to declare martial law under executive order 18303. Why do you think some of the government agencies are dragging their feet about complying?" she asked me, but then she offered, "I'm not saying it's a big conspiracy."

Indeed, protest organizers like Hair were determined to present the movement as mainstream. They ditched a plan to stage a funeral procession down Pennsylvania Avenue with coffins representing the various victims on the Body Count—for fear it would make them look "kooky." Signs that might have offended the television audience were suppressed; a man dressed as the Grim Reaper had his "HANG THE TRAITOR" sign redacted to read "TRAITOR." And, much to popular dismay, the Freeper leaders decided to deny Patrick Knowlton a chance to address the crowd during the protest. Knowlton, of course, is the man who pulled into Fort Marcy Park to relieve himself the day Vince Foster's body was found there. What Knowlton did or did not see in the parking lot that day is at the center of what is still the most obsessively discussed Clinton conspiracy theory on the far right: Foster's purported "murder."

Lucianne Goldberg, called "Trixie" online and known as the "Godmother of Free Republic," says she visits the site every day. "Mother's milk," she calls it. I found her taking a break from signing autographs backstage at the protest and asked her about the Y2K scenario and the Body Count. She dismissed it all as the "lunatic fringe" of the site. "They don't just indiscriminately murder White House interns," she said. "I'm not into controversy," added the woman who directed Linda Tripp to tape record Monica Lewinsky.

After the rally, the crowd moved on to a wine and pizza reception. The attendees were a virtual who's who of the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy: The omnipresent Goldberg gave a rousing speech about family values and implored her Freepers to adopt more of a "guerrilla mentality"; Reed Irvine of Accuracy in Media spouted platitudes about liberal propaganda; former Clinton bodyguard L.D. Brown wowed the audience with tales of an affair between Hillary and Vince Foster. And there, finally, was Patrick Knowlton—a short, balding man waiting to take center stage as Freepers clamored for his autograph. "You should've been on that stage today," one man told him.

Knowlton didn't give a speech but instead took questions from the audience. Although his personal knowledge was limited to what he had observed while taking that fateful leak, to this crowd Knowlton was like an oracle. "Do you know where the FBI files are? Are they still in the White House or where?" one man asked.

"How big is the cover-up?" inquired another.

"I understand Mrs. Foster has remarried back into the Arkansas power cabal."

"Who does Mr. Bruce Lindsey work for? Who pays his freight?"

At one point, a young man dared to suggest that the midterm elections were more important than Vince Foster. He was quickly shouted down. Cried one of the boozers: "There are too many dead bodies around!" •

SWITZERLAND POSTCARD

UNACCOUNTABLE

By Joseph Finder

ZURICH

In a dive bar on Heinrichstrasse, I'm deep in conversation with Miss Switzerland 1994. We're sitting at a long table surrounded by 16 of the most beautiful women in the country, the contestants for this year's Miss Switzerland crown. I'm almost deafened by the blaring Eurotechnopop, but I can just make out what she's saying. She's telling me why Switzerland will never win Miss Universe. "Miss Universe is all about connections and power," she says, "and the biggest, most powerful countries always win. Never Switzerland."

This small and wealthy country is feeling a bit isolated, powerless, and thin-skinned these days. Used to be when you said Switzerland, people thought chocolate, Alps, and Heidi. Now it's laundered money, Nazis, and bank accounts stolen from Holocaust victims and survivors. One very prominent banker here promised to meet with me on the condition that I would not mention Topic A, the so-called "dormant accounts." Not that he had anything to hide, he said; he'd just had it with the whole tiresome subject.

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently wrote a letter to World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman congratulating him on finally reaching a settlement with the Swiss banks, the Swiss—including many Swiss Jews—were furious. They considered the attack both hypocritical and opportunistic. After all, the Israelis had tactfully stayed out of the whole mess for years—until there was a settlement and the promise of \$1.25 billion to distribute to Holocaust survivors around the world. And what about the \$250 million in dormant accounts in *Israeli* banks?

One Swiss banker told me that the real reason the two biggest Swiss banks, Credit Suisse and UBS AG, agreed to settle the Holocaust-accounts dispute was not the threat of sanctions by American state governments. It was that many of their employees around the world, and those of the investment banks they work with, are Jews. "Outside Switzerland," he told me, "investment banking is Jewish." They were concerned, another banker admitted, not with their past but with their future—their future relations with American banks.

Yet there may have been a more cynical reason that the banks were so eager to settle. The Swiss-Jewish journalist Gisela Blau told me that, when the \$1.25 billion settlement was tentatively reached in Brooklyn on August 12, a sigh of relief could be heard along the

Bahnhofstrasse. And not just because the nightmare of being pilloried before the world was over, not just because business relationships were once again secure, but because the deal would end the investigation before any more dark secrets of Switzerland's vast wartime dealings with the Nazis could be unearthed. Under the agreement (the final details of which are still to be worked out), all Holocaust-related claims and lawsuits are annulled. No longer will bank archives be ransacked for evidence of wartime criminal activity. No longer will banks be pressured to reveal paper trails left by the middlemen—those lawyers and accountants and others who opened bank accounts on behalf of foreign Jews and then seized the money once the rightful owners were exterminated. As for acknowledging guilt or responsibility for their past misdeeds, the banks and the government are off the hook. No wonder the banks are privately so euphoric.

Now the world will never learn how the Swiss banks safeguarded the assets of Nazi war criminals or protected from Allied scrutiny the holdings of the German industries that underwrote and sustained the Reich, built the gas chambers and crematoria, and supplied the Zyklon B. Or how the Swiss helped channel these ill-gotten gains back to Germany after the war.

And now, finally, everything here can go back to what passes here for normal. A few years in the pillory hasn't altered the peculiar Swiss moral calculus. When it came out this past May that the government-owned Swiss National Bank had received 119.5 kilos of gold the Nazis had extracted from the mouths of Jewish extermination-camp prisoners and from wedding bands pried from their fingers, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Zurich's leading conservative daily, editorialized that everyone was making an outsized fuss over this gold. For heaven's sake, they were talking about a mere 0.04 percent of the 600 tons of gold the National Bank accepted from the Reichsbank—an insignificant number, really.

But the *Zeitung's* soulless mathematics is just an example of the chilling logic that underlies the Swiss justification for their wartime actions. This is a land of accounting, not accountability. In defending perhaps the darkest chapter in Swiss history—not the laundering of Nazi gold but the turning away of refugees seeking entry, before and during the war, in order to escape the death camps—the Swiss government argues that it let in just about as many as it turned away: 28,000 accepted versus 30,000 rejected.

It's true, as Gisela Blau points out, that the United States, whose wartime population was 33 times greater than Switzerland's, admitted no more than 21,000 refugees (mostly Jewish) during the course of the war—a mere ten percent of the quota limits legally available, meaning that as many as 90 percent of those Jews we could have let in, or some 190,000 people, may have gone to their deaths. In both actual and relative terms, tiny Switzerland admitted significantly more. We may criticize the Swiss, but our record on refugees (under

the Roosevelt administration) was far worse.

Still, the Swiss tally obscures the fact that the government's miserly policy was to admit only as many Jews as the resident Swiss-Jewish community would commit to support by itself. All others would be kept out—a particularly insidious form of blackmail. And it's quite likely the number of Jews the Swiss rejected was far higher than 30,000, an official number based on refugee archives that were sealed for decades. The interior minister of Switzerland, who's in charge of the federal archives, insisted, naturally, that this secrecy was to protect personal privacy. Then, in 1994, the archives were suddenly opened. A new interior minister had come into office, Ruth Dreifuss, a Jew whose father was active in saving refugees during the war in the east of Switzerland. (Next year, incidentally, she'll become the president of Switzerland, the first woman and, of course, the first Jew to hold this honorific office, which will be of at least totemic importance.) There, an alarming discovery was made: *Two-thirds* of the refugee files turned out to be nothing more than empty folders. The papers had been destroyed in 1956 and 1957, in violation of Swiss law—"for space reasons," the head of the archives maintained.

Among the files that had survived were records of at least 30,000 refugees turned away. It was based on that incomplete survey that the Swiss government calculated the number of Jews kept out. Who knows what was in those empty files? Gerhart Riegner, vice president of the World Jewish Congress (who, as the young World Jewish Congress representative in Geneva in 1942, first informed the U.S. State Department about the systematic extermination of Europe's Jews) believes that the figure is at least 100,000 refugees rejected.

In the past few years, several Holocaust survivors have taken the Swiss government to court over Swiss behavior during the war. But, now that the Nazi gold scandal has faded and our attention is elsewhere, it will be interesting to see what happens to those lawsuits.

In 1997, a London businessman named Charles Sonabend filed a claim for 100,000 Swiss francs (about \$70,000) for the death of both of his parents, under the Swiss Law of Responsibility. His claim stems from events in 1942, when Sonabend was eleven, and he, his sister, and their parents fled from German-occupied Belgium to Switzerland. What the Sonabends didn't know was that precisely one day after they'd entered, the head of the Swiss police, Heinrich Rothmund, issued confidential orders that only *political* refugees were to be admitted, but "people who state that they are refugees purely on *racial* grounds, e.g., Jews, are not considered to be political refugees" (my italics). The Swiss police rounded the Sonabends up and deported them to occupied France, whereupon the children were sent to a Jewish children's orphanage in Paris and the parents were sent to Auschwitz and gassed a week later.

This was the first claim ever filed against the Swiss state for its wartime actions on refugees, and, unsurprisingly, the government rejected it on the grounds that



the statute of limitations had run out. Moreover, the government added, "In contrast to the Nazi regime, Swiss federal officials committed no war crimes." But, as Sonabend's lawyer, Marc Richter, told me, in fact Sonabend and his sister had for decades been trying to get the Swiss records of his deportation—only to be told, repeatedly, that the records were missing. Then, two years ago, a Swiss journalist happened upon them, misfiled in the Bern archives, while doing research. So Sonabend had had access to the files for only two years. The case is now pending before the Supreme Court of Switzerland, in Lausanne. But a happy ending doesn't seem likely.

Only outside political pressure seems to make the Swiss cooperative when it comes to Holocaust-era claims. Last year, an Austrian-born Holocaust survivor now living in Israel, Eli Carmel, filed a similar claim against the canton of Basel. In 1939, Carmel was deported by the Basel police and delivered straight into the hands of the Germans, who then sent him to Sachsenhausen. At first, the Basel government rejected this claim, saying his file was either lost or had been accidentally discarded. But a chance "discovery" saved Carmel's case. A bureaucrat in Geneva opened the door to a room that hadn't been opened in decades, or so he claimed, and found tens of thousands of refugee files that had been thought destroyed. Among them was a copy of Carmel's file. Carmel received 50,000 Swiss francs—presumably because the government of Basel wanted to avoid controversy on the eve of the centen-

nial celebration of the first Zionist Congress there.

When Carmel's victory was recounted by Gisela Blau in the Swiss-Jewish weekly *Jüdische Rundschau*, and published on the Internet, another Holocaust survivor read it with interest. He was Joseph Spring, a travel agent living in Australia. In November 1943, at the age of 16, Spring had tried to flee from Belgium to Switzerland with his two cousins, bearing forged French passports. When the Swiss border guards pronounced the papers fake, the cousins, believing they could enter as political refugees, produced their original German-Jewish passports, stamped with a *J*. The guards drove the boys right to the German side of the border, presenting the German officers with the cousins' Jewish passports. All three were sent to Auschwitz; only Spring survived.

At the time, the Swiss government knew exactly what was happening to the Jews. They knew what the crematoria at Auschwitz were for, where the plumes of smoke came from. In fact, documents in the Swiss archives make it undeniably clear that the government even knew the capacity of the crematoria at Auschwitz, down to the number of bodies processed each day. Spring's claim, too, awaits decision by the Swiss Supreme Court. The Swiss government rejected it with the tenderest sympathy; such terrible deeds, it said, cannot be compensated with mere money.

JOSEPH FINDER writes frequently on intelligence and international affairs. He is the author of *High Crimes* and *The Zero Hour*.

Can South Africans really face the past?

THE TRUTH HURTS

By Ken Owen

Public discourse in South Africa, shrill at the best of times, has reached a new level of anger and recrimination as the tribes and factions of this divided nation try to absorb a damning verdict: No faction, neither oppressor nor freedom fighter, neither white nor black, neither suburb nor ghetto township, can entirely escape culpability for the gross abuse of human rights that took place during the long years of violent struggle against apartheid.

That, in tight summary, was the finding of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, under the chairman-

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ship of former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whose massive report—five volumes, a million words—was handed to President Nelson Mandela at the end of October. Consternation was immediate. Former President F.W. de Klerk, joint winner with Mandela of the Nobel Peace Prize, raced to court and succeeded in having a half-page finding on himself blacked out. (This was done in accordance with an agreement negotiated by his lawyers, but the grounds have not been disclosed.) The African National Congress (ANC) foolishly followed him into court but failed to persuade the judge to delay publication. Mandela's designated successor, Thabo Mbeki, lost his usual composure to denounce the truth commission's find-

ings as “inaccurate” and contrary to international law.

Tutu was furious. He was, he said, “devastated” by the ANC’s attempt to interfere with the commission. “I did not struggle against one tyranny in order to replace it with another.” Harsh words, but Mandela, his instincts as unerringly honest as ever, supported Tutu: “The ANC was fighting a just war, but, in the course of fighting the just war, it committed gross violations of human rights.” His apparent repudiation of Mbeki, his own favorite, gave rise to speculation that the ANC itself was split on the matter. Denials and clarifications floated on the air like confetti. Meanwhile, Niel Barnard, former head of the apartheid intelligence service, threatened to sue, and Afrikaans newspapers wailed about a vendetta against Afrikaners.

All of which was highly satisfying, for it helped to remove widespread doubts about the credibility and even-handedness of the commission to uncover the truth about the gross violations of human rights committed during the 30-year war against apartheid. By forcing the ANC to come to grips with its own brutal excesses—without in any way whitewashing the record of the apartheid regime—the commission sent an important and timeless message to other struggles against oppression: that you must beware becoming what you are fighting against; that even the most just war does not justify unjust tactics. This is a message that will also temper any residual ANC triumphalism as the Congress enters the next century as South Africa’s presumptive governing party.

Appointed under the terms of the new South African constitution in the touching belief that truth heals old wounds, the commission was required not only to find out what happened but to encourage reconciliation among the antagonistic parties to a bitter racial war. The task was immense, and, in the end, the truth commission uncovered very little that South Africa’s restricted and harassed newspapers hadn’t recorded first (save, perhaps, for the discovery of a mad government program of chemical warfare aimed at, among other things, finding ways to render black people, and only black people, sterile).

But the truth commission did flesh out the details. It hardened rumor into fact, speculation into certainty. Everybody knew, despite the preposterous findings of an official inquest, that Steve Biko had been beaten to death in the police cells, that nearly 100 other detainees were killed in custody, and that thousands of activists were tortured. Many of them, as some confessions to the commission confirmed, became police informers and carried a terrible burden of guilt for further torture.

Everybody knew, but, even so, the details were mind-numbing and shocking. One woman cried for a single bone of her son’s body to be returned to her so that she could give him a decent burial. Another told how she was stripped, her breast was shoved into a desk drawer, and the drawer was slammed on her nipple. A third was kept naked until she found a piece of blue

plastic and made a pair of panties for herself before she was killed. Police operatives told how they enjoyed a barbecue while burning bodies nearby and how they disposed of bodies by exploding dynamite under them repeatedly. So terrible was the evidence, so vivid the testimony, that some commissioners and even some journalists had to receive psychiatric help to deal with their nightmares.

Who was accountable? Some police officers, offered amnesty if they came clean, told of the torture and blamed their superiors. They, like Adolf Eichmann in Nazi Germany, acted under orders. And whose orders? Here the commission’s real difficulties began. When de Klerk announced the end of apartheid in February 1990, the paper shredders and the incinerators in Pretoria, the capital, began to work overtime. Literally millions of documents were destroyed. Newspapers caught a sniff of it at the time, but they were ignored while the shredding and burning continued. In the end, the commission found, South Africa’s institutional memory was purged of evidence of the reign of apartheid. Some individuals had looted documents for their own purposes, including blackmail, but officials carried out most of the destruction under a policy de Klerk and his Cabinet had laid down and approved. As a result, the party leaders, now secure, could pretend that, when they used words like “eliminate” or “terminate,” they did not mean “kill.” And was it their fault if their underlings, a few bad eggs, jumped to lethal conclusions? The commission treated their arguments with the scorn that they deserved: it found the political leaders to be accountable.

As for the other side of the conflict, here, too, the truth was known in broad outline. The ANC put bombs under lunch counters and outside a busy sports stadium; it planted landmines in farming areas; it killed more civilians than soldiers or policemen. In its own base camps, the ANC tortured or killed suspected informers and dissidents. From Lusaka and Addis Ababa, it urged black South Africans to violence. The conflict generated slogans such as “kill the farmers, kill the Boers,” “eliminate the *impimpis* [informers],” and “kill collaborators.”

Among those named as “collaborators” was Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Zulus, who had broken with the ANC. An attempt was made to assassinate Buthelezi, who turned to the apartheid government for arms and training, and soon the bloodiest battles of the 1980s were being fought in Zululand between black factions. The killing spread to the main industrial area around Johannesburg, where Zulu migrant workers had gathered in single-sex “hostels.” (The hostels became quasi-military strongholds from which cohorts of warriors raided ANC territory.) Throughout the townships, the ANC killed putative “informers” and “collaborators,” often by the dreadful “necklace”—a car tire placed around the victim’s neck, filled with gasoline and set alight.

The ANC leadership, Mbeki in particular, told the

commission it greatly regretted these atrocities but denied responsibility. Sounding an awful lot like de Klerk, the ANC explained that the actions were the result of poor communication and poor control of the cadres in the field; the perpetrators were "supporters who were not members of the ANC." The ANC leaders also continue to argue that, because they were engaged in a "just war," their actions could not be compared with those of the apartheid forces who were trying to preserve a system of oppression and deprivation seen by the whole world as "a crime against humanity."

The commission acknowledged that the ANC was waging a just war but said that even a just war must be fought under the laws of war as laid down in the Geneva and other conventions. The ANC, it found, must be held accountable for the atrocities and abuses of human rights committed in its struggle for liberation.

This finding shocked the ANC leaders. They had a tendency to preen themselves as holding the moral high ground, and, in recent political debate, have increasingly resorted to accusations of "complicity in apartheid" to silence liberal critics. But Tutu's commission has no doubt: atrocity is atrocity, and, while a just war may explain, it cannot justify the use of barbarous methods. By stripping away the sophistry, in the face of great pressure from the ANC, the commission has perhaps contributed importantly to a wider debate.

Supporters of the commission say, with as much hope as conviction, that South Africa now has an agreed-upon version of what happened during

apartheid. That cannot be correct. Truth is an elusive quarry, and facts are fools. The historians lie in wait, to discover lost documents, to puncture assumptions, and to draw parallels to Chile, to Nazi Germany, to the Soviet bloc, to Spain.

They will find serious anomalies and inexplicable lacunae in this report. For example, the commission condemned the medical profession for complicity in the human rights abuses of apartheid and found that newspaper owners were collaborators while many journalists were feeble. Yet it made no serious inquiry into a question that has tortured the postwar German judiciary: What was the role of the judges who enforced wicked law (including more than 100 laws restricting the press) with diligence and evident enthusiasm?

Other flaws are easy to find. One commissioner, Wynand Malan, a lawyer and politician, disassociated himself from the findings because, he said, the commissioners had not even had time to read, much less debate, their conclusions. The report was the work of teams of staffers. Also, some of the evidence was shaky. Some witnesses were not even present at the events they purported to describe. These shortcomings lay down the lines of future battles.

But, while this report is easy to criticize, it is impossible to dismiss. It is a first draft (or, in fairness to the newspapers that chronicled the day-to-day oppressions of apartheid for nearly half a century, a second draft) of South Africa's bitter history. It is a brave first step toward fulfilling Mandela's vow: "Never again." •

America votes for liberal centrism.

THE MIGHTY MIDDLE

By John B. Judis

There have been two exceptional elections over the past decade—in 1992 and 1994—that appeared to promise dramatic change. But the other elections have affirmed an equilibrium between the two parties and between the extremes of liberalism and conservatism. They have not mandated inaction—although that has sometimes been the unfortunate result—but rather a cautious, incremental program of reform focused on education, health care, and the environment. They have affirmed Americans' support for Social Security, Medicare, and environmental and consumer regulation, as well as opposition to radicalism of the left or right—whether in the form of a government-run health care system or the privatization of

Social Security. And they have signaled the public's discomfort with the social agenda of the religious right.

And so it was with 1998. The Democrats did much better than expected precisely because the public identified them with a cautious, liberal centrism. Those Republicans who did particularly well, such as Texas Governor George W. Bush or Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, were also identified with this kind of political approach. The real losers in the election were right-wing Republicans. In open seats and closely contested races, Democrats were able to defeat Republicans who championed the right's program of banning abortion, privatizing Social Security, and abolishing federal aid to education. In the 1998 elections, being identified

as a "right-wing extremist" became more dangerous to a politician's future than being identified as a "liberal."

In the gubernatorial races, and many of the Senate contests, the public judged candidates by their commitment to using government resources to improve education. Democrats won governor's races in South Carolina, Alabama, Iowa, and California because they advocated vigorous state aid to, and regulation of, education, while their Republican opponents either ignored the issue or opposed new state initiatives. South Carolina gubernatorial candidate Jim Hodges and Alabama candidate Don Siegelman, following the example of outgoing Georgia Governor Zell Miller, called for a state lottery to boost spending on education. In Iowa, Democrat Tom Vilsack advocated spending state money on education, while his Republican opponent, Jim Ross Lightfoot, made a tax cut his first priority. In California, Democrat Gray Davis focused his campaign on creating higher standards for education, while his Republican opponent, Dan Lungren, ran a "back to the future" law-and-order campaign.

Democratic defenses of Social Security also proved pivotal. Much of the Democratic appeal was based on the somewhat spurious issue of the budget surplus. Democrats argued that, by resisting tax cuts, they were "saving" Social Security. Republicans might have argued that, by speeding economic growth, tax cuts would raise Social Security revenues, but having worshiped so many years at the altar of the balanced budget, they were unable to counter these Democratic attacks. Meanwhile, some Republican candidates went looking for trouble by advocating the privatization of Social Security. In Arkansas, Democratic Senate candidate Blanche Lambert Lincoln lambasted Republican Fay Boozman for wanting to replace a mandatory public insurance system with one that allowed private investment accounts. In Mississippi's fourth congressional district, which extends southward from Jackson, Democrat Ronnie Shows ran television ads attacking Republican Delbert Hosemann's plan for private investment. Shows's ads warned that senior citizens' savings could be jeopardized by stock-market volatility and charged that Hosemann was fronting for the securities industry.

In many Northern races, and even in a few Southern ones, Democrats benefited by tying their opponents to the religious right. Republican Fob James in Alabama (a Christian Coalition favorite who once threatened to call in the National Guard to defend the right of a local judge to display the Ten Commandments in his courtroom), Boozman in Arkansas (a proponent of Christian home schooling), Iowa's Lightfoot, Maryland gubernatorial candidate Ellen Sauerbrey, Washington Senate candidate Linda Smith, and Kansas Congressman Vince Snowbarger were all hurt by their identification with the religious right. And then there was California Senate candidate Matt Fong, who had, at one point, staked himself to a healthy lead over incumbent Democrat Barbara Boxer by painting himself as a moderate. On October 25, *The San Francisco Examiner*

revealed that, during his primary campaign against a conservative opponent, Fong had donated \$50,000 to the Traditional Values Coalition, a virulently anti-gay, anti-abortion lobby run by the Reverend Louis Sheldon, who describes himself as a "lobbyist for the Lord." Soon after Fong's contribution, Sheldon had thrown his support behind him in the primary. Fong spent the last ten days of the campaign trying unsuccessfully to reconcile his claims of moderation—and his endorsement by the gay Log Cabin Republicans—with his financial support for Sheldon.

The Democrats' success will doubtless spark a new round in the debate between party liberals and "New Democrats." But the lessons of the election don't entirely fit the arguments of either faction.

The party's success clearly demonstrates that Democrats cannot uniformly adopt the kind of inflexible liberal stands activists championed during the 1970s and 1980s. While a steep recession might alter public opinion, many Americans remain suspicious of ambitious government programs and of spending that singles out Democratic constituencies. Take Northern California's Contra Costa County as an example. While Representative George Miller could champion the Democrats' old-time religion in blue-collar Richmond, Ellen Tauscher, who represents the neighboring high-tech suburbs of Walnut Creek and Livermore, could not. Fortunately, Democrats have become quite pragmatic on such matters: John Dalrymple, the head of the Contra Costa County Central Labor Council, disagrees with Tauscher's support for NAFTA and for giving the president fast-track trade negotiating authority. But, he says, "The reality is that she is the best Democrat who could be elected from the district."

Indeed, Democrats succeeded in many key contests because the primary voters nominated centrists instead of more traditional liberals. If militant consumer advocate Mark Green and not Representative Charles Schumer had faced New York Senator Al D'Amato, the Republicans probably would have retained the seat. If Harvey Gantt and not John Edwards had run against North Carolina incumbent Republican Lauch Faircloth, the election would have focused on affirmative action and urban aid—issues unfavorable to Democratic success—rather than on HMOs and education. The proof for this proposition comes from the closely contested Lexington, Kentucky, district that Democrat Scotty Baesler represented before he ran for Senate this year. There, Democrats nominated the most liberal candidate in the primary. He lost.

In some Southern and Southwestern districts, where Protestant fundamentalists and Pentecostals predominate, Democrats went so far as to nominate candidates who shared a conservative social agenda. Charles Stenholm in Texas, Marjorie McKeithen in Louisiana, Ronnie Shows in Mississippi, and Ken Lucas in Kentucky are pro-life Democrats. They are also more fiscally conservative than many Northern Democrats and more inclined

to distance themselves from the Clinton administration. But they were still considerably to the left of their far-out Republican opponents. For instance, Stenholm's opponent, Rudy Izzard, whom he defeated after a difficult campaign, wanted to abolish the income tax and withdraw the United States from the United Nations.

Yet, while the 1998 election showed that many Democrats have to move to the center, it defined a center that was still firmly rooted in the legacy of the New Deal, Medicare, and the regulatory reforms of the 1970s. It was, in other words, a *liberal* centrism. Democrats did not win by advocating the partial privatization of Social Security—which the Democratic Leadership Council currently favors—but by defending the current system. If the Democrats were to embrace Republican and securities-industry plans for privatization, they would abandon a major source of their support. Similarly, Democrats also didn't win support by advocating private-school vouchers; quite the contrary, they won by promising to strengthen public education. Tauscher is a perfect example. While she backed some Republican tax cuts and voted for an impeachment inquiry, she rejected Social Security privatization and private-school vouchers.

The election did show that Democrats can appeal to the white, suburban upper-middle class in Contra Costa County, Boulder, Portland, Seattle, and the Research Triangle of Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill. But the Democrats would be foolish to target future political appeals exclusively, or even primarily, to this group of voters. After all, this year the Democrats would have fared just as poorly as they did in 1994 were it not for an unusually high voter turnout among the two most famously traditional liberal constituencies: blacks and union families. In Maryland's gubernatorial contest, for instance, black turnout increased from twelve percent of the vote in 1994 to 19 percent in 1998. Black voters provided the margin of victory for Parris Glendening over Sauerbrey. According to national exit polls, union households went from 14 percent of the electorate in 1994 to 23 percent in 1998—a huge jump that was the result of an AFL-CIO get-out-the-vote program. Hispanics were also very important to Democratic successes: Gray Davis won an estimated 75 percent of California's Hispanic vote. Democrats can ignore these constituencies only at their peril.

As for the Republicans, their failure will spur an even more vigorous internal debate. The election's victims were, primarily, those most closely identified with the right—not only Alabama's James and North Carolina's Faircloth but also former Representative Robert Dornan, who lost a rematch with Loretta Sanchez in California, and Assemblyman Tom Bordonaro (also in California), who lost a rematch with Lois Capps. And most of those Republicans who won open seats or upset incumbents ran centrist campaigns. In Sacramento, millionaire businessman Doug Ose, who favors abortion rights, defeated Barbara Alby, a candidate of the Christian right, in a bitterly contested primary—and then went on to capture the seat currently held by

retiring Democrat Vic Fazio. Alby would have surely lost.

In Illinois, Republican gubernatorial candidate George Ryan championed abortion rights, gun control, and the environment against his socially conservative Democratic opponent. (Senate victor Peter Fitzgerald is a right-winger, but his triumph was due to the defects of his opponent, Democratic incumbent Carol Moseley-Braun.) George W. Bush ran as a "compassionate conservative" and champion of education reform in Texas. While backed by the religious right, he conspicuously opposed its attempts to force all Texas Republicans to adhere to its agenda. Bush and other successful Republicans also refused to allow the Democrats to monopolize the black and Hispanic vote.

If the Republicans heed this lesson, they will nominate someone like Bush in 2000 without forcing him to embrace a platform written by Pat Buchanan, the Christian Coalition, or Gary Bauer's Family Research Council. A Republican nominee in 2000 will have to distance himself as far from the Christian Coalition as Bill Clinton distanced himself from the Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition in 1992. If the Republicans ignore the lesson of this election and nominate someone like former Vice President Dan Quayle or Missouri Senator John Ashcroft, or if they demand a kind of conservative doctrinal loyalty oath from Bush or another governor, they could cede control of the White House for the next decade. Almost any Democrat who is considering running for president could defeat a candidate identified with the Republican right.

In the meantime, the Republicans will have to figure out what to do with their majority in Congress. In 1994, the national party developed a platform, the Contract with America, that was designed to appeal to the voters who had backed Ross Perot in 1992. This year, the Republicans had no substantive agenda (see "Indian Summer," by John B. Judis, *TNR*, November 9). They rested their hopes primarily on the scandal swirling around Bill Clinton and, in the campaign's last week, mounted a targeted advertising campaign designed to make the election in key districts a referendum on Clinton's personal behavior. This effort backfired, energizing Democratic voters nationally and dramatizing the Republican Congress's failures. Democrats won exactly those close races in South and North Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, where the Republicans had tried to make Monica Lewinsky the issue.

The Republicans have emerged from this campaign in an unenviable position. The nominal winners, they lack a mandate to govern. They also lack a program with which they might acquire a mandate. By contrast, the Democrats have to be inspired by these results. If they read them correctly—if they don't see in them a justification for either a further lurch rightward on Social Security or for the revival of old-style liberalism—and if they accommodate old and new Democrats in the same party, then they could be on the way to reclaiming the majority they lost to Ronald Reagan two decades ago. •

BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Changing the Past

In *Pleasantville* (New Line) David and Jennifer, brother and sister, are small-town high school students. David is besotted with a 1950s TV series—called “Pleasantville”—and is about to watch a 12-hour marathon of repeat broadcasts, hoping to answer questions about the show correctly and win a prize. But a mysterious TV repairman suddenly appears and gives them a special remote control; when they use it, David and Jennifer are transported back into the Pleasantville of the 1950s program. Not at all pleasant, they feel.

Like Mark Twain’s Connecticut Yankee and dozens of other returnees to the past, David and Jennifer know the world that’s coming, which no one else around them knows; also, they chafe at the social customs and restrictions of the 1950s. As they take up the lives of the TV brother and sister they have replaced, they wreak several kinds of havoc. When Jennifer goes on a lovers’-lane date with the high school basketball captain, she alters the conventional hand-holding into something more glandular. David, who finds himself working in a soda shop, not only urges his boss, Mr. Johnson, to take up the painting he has secretly longed to do, he encourages Johnson to pursue the affair with David’s (TV) mother that was broken off years ago when she married his nerdy father.

Everything and everyone in Pleasantville are in black and white, which irritates David and Jennifer. But everyone who gets liberated from 1950s strictures, mostly through their ministrations, changes into Living Color. (A few flowers, an apple, in the right circumstances,

also take on color.) As time goes on, we see, in the same shot, people in black and white alongside others in color, marking a difference in freedom. Some of the black-and-white shopkeepers are so resentful that they put up signs in their windows: “No Coloreds.”

A crisis boils up, with a stormy town meeting, but that mysterious TV repairman arrives in time to get David back to his home in the 1990s. Jennifer elects to stay in the 1950s because she has acquired habits of study she didn’t have in the present and can now go to college. Why her 1990s mother doesn’t miss her and how everything that has happened back there affects the canned TV shows are only two of the questions that the plot ignores.

Gary Ross, who wrote, directed, and produced *Pleasantville*, has cast the film adequately, getting particularly touching work from Jeff Daniels as Mr. Johnson and Joan Allen as his secret love. By now Ross has seen his picture often compared to *The Truman Show*, but the

resemblance is slight. In Jim Carrey’s film, all the people but him knew that they were in a show; here—oddly—it’s just the other way around. The people in Pleasantville don’t know they’re on a TV show. Only David and Jennifer know, and they keep trying to change, to modernize, the past.

Chuckles abound. But, amusing as *Pleasantville* frequently is, as all time-strata juxtapositions can be, the film is based on a smugness and a falsity. The present always preens itself on being smarter than the past; but this is not inarguably true in every aspect. (It’s not even inarguably true that high school dating was more restrained then than it is today.) And the falsity overarching the film is the assumption that the 1950s were actually as they were represented in 1950s TV. David and Jennifer are not revisiting the world of the past, just one of its media representations. *Pleasantville* is only a satire on the sort of TV that the public was willing to accept in the 1950s. *The Truman Show* is a comment on the world outside TV, on our current intoxication with factuality as truth.

Roberto Benigni, who cowrote, directed, and stars in *Life Is Beautiful* (Miramax), is one of Italy’s most popular comedians. Americans have had the chance to see him in Fellini’s last film, *Voices of the Moon*, and in two of Jarmusch’s films, *Down by Law* and *Night on Earth*, in all of which he showed himself to be a skilled clown in the circus tradition—what can be called silhouette comedy, as against the combination of silhouette and interiority that marks Chaplin or Keaton.

Benigni’s new film leaves the province in which we have seen him and moves into the Chaplin-Keaton area. He has made a comedy about a Nazi concentration camp. Actually, he has made half a film on that subject. Apparently he couldn’t devise enough material to set the whole film in the camp, so he fills the first half of the picture with his slapstick (silhouette) adventures on the way to marriage and the begetting of the son who is the focus of the second half.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Happiness. Sharp writing and directing and acting mark this exploration of inner vacancies in today’s maneuvers of love and desire. Mordancy, thy name is Todd Solondz (the auteur). (Reviewed 11/9/98) **Lolita.** Dominique Swain entwines cajoling, Jeremy Irons is more melancholy than doomed. Closer to Nabokov than the earlier film, still... (10/5/98) **Saving Private Ryan.** Steven Spielberg recreates D-Day titanically, but then goes on to settle for another good war movie. (8/17&24/98) **La Sentinelle.** A peculiar but fascinating account of a Parisian medical student who finds a mummified human head among his things. Political and personal complications follow. Delicately made, engrossingly inexplicable. (11/16/98)—SK

And that second half requires acting—genuine acting—at which Benigni is not quite adept.

Benigni plays Guido, a Jewish waiter who, after marriage, opens a bookshop. He and his wife (Nicoletta Braschi) adore their small boy (Giorgio Cantarini). When all three are ultimately taken to the concentration camp, Guido gets the idea to pretend that the whole horror is a game—to soothe and to protect the boy. For instance, in the camp Guido persuades the boy that the heavy labor that is forced on the inmates is a contest in which all are trying to win points toward a prize.

If this idea grates somewhat in synopsis—and there are numerous others like it—it grates only a little less in the film itself, mitigated skimpily by Benigni's clowning, not by his acting. In the press notes he cites, as one of his inspirations for the film, a line from Primo Levi's *If*

This Is a Man. During his imprisonment Levi thinks: "What if all this were nothing but a joke? This cannot be true...." But the cosmic reverberations of Levi's comment are reduced to the incredible and the distasteful in Benigni's mundane circus antics. Any repugnance we might feel is supposed to be swept away by the wash of paternal love, Guido's intent to protect his son from the facts. This protection is so blatantly impossible that the paternal love begins to seem theatrically phony. Even a small child (if he had been able to survive with his father) would have seen fairly soon that the object of the camp was not to have fun, a fact that renders Benigni's idea much less a moving instance of love than an actor's shallow conceit. Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* wrung some grim comedy out of a concentration camp—without whimsy. Benigni certainly knew the risk he was taking with his idea, but the circumstances overwhelm him. •

The Heart That Howls

BY BERNARD KNOX

Collected Poems 1920-1954

by Eugenio Montale

translated and annotated by Jonathan Galassi

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 626 pp., \$40)

Satura 1962-1970

by Eugenio Montale

translated with notes by William Arrowsmith

edited by Rosanna Warren

(Norton, 220 pp., \$29.95)

The traveler sailing eastward along the Italian coast from the great port of Genoa passes an inhospitable shoreline of rocky cliffs backed by mountains, which is at its most formidable as the promontory shielding the naval base of La Spezia comes into view. On this stretch of coast is the small village of Monterosso. Here, in a country house built by his family, the poet Eugenio Montale, born in Genoa in 1896, spent most of his summers for the first thirty years of his life.

The harsh weather of that Ligurian coast is the salient element of the three books of poetry that eventually, in 1975, gained him the Nobel Prize for Literature. They vibrate with the sea-breezes that give the basil used for *pesto*, the local

specialty, its inimitable flavor, and with the storm winds that (in Jonathan Galassi's masterly translation) "drum the hard/magnolia leaves with long March/thunder and hail," with the "rabid sirocco/gale that burns/the parched land's yellowgreen." They are shrouded in "the haze/the wind breaks through/or whips up, wild." They bask, too, in the "glory of expanded noon/when the trees give up no shade."

Yet this is no Romantic celebration of Nature, no Wordsworthian pantheistic identification: "By grace divine/Not otherwise, O Nature, we are thine." Montale's feelings are closer to those of Giacomo Leopardi, a contemporary of Wordsworth, an Italian poet whom Montale admired, whose despairing assessment of the human condition is summed

"Is it possible for a philosopher to have a wicked wit, a kindly heart, a passion for clarity, and an utterly convincing argument that crossword puzzles are, for thinkers, what labs are for scientists? It is, if her name is Susan Haack."

—ROBERT HEILBRONER,
author of *The Worldly Philosophers*

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up in his stern recommendation to "scorn ... nature, the ugly power that from concealment ordains our common ruin, and the infinite futility of the universe." Montale's assessment is no less bleak. It is, in fact, all the harsher, because its imagery is drawn from the grim landscape of an industrial city: "And walking in the dazzling sun,/feel with sad amazement/that all life and its torment/consists in following along a wall/with broken bottle shards imbedded in the top."

In Montale's poetry, the elemental forces of nature are evidence of a "divine Indifference" and serve as images of his own desperation: "the gale in the heart that howls." "My life is this dry slope,/a means not an end, a way/open to runoff from gutters and slow erosion." For the years of his young manhood, from 1917 to 1944, the years in which he wrote the three books of poems that were to establish his reputation as Italy's greatest modern poet, were years of frustration and dejection punctuated by periods of deep depression and suicidal moods.

In 1917, his studies completed, Montale was called up for military service. Trained as an infantry officer, he saw action on the Triestino front where, in Alpine country, the Italians faced Austrian and German troops. Back in civilian life, he wrote (and occasionally managed to publish) poems and reviews. In 1925, his article "Homage to Italo Svevo" introduced the Triestino writer to the Italian public. Yet he was unable to find a regular position in the literary world, and at one point he even thought of becoming a bank clerk.

Montale would undoubtedly have been more successful if, like so many other veterans of the war, he had joined the Fascist Party (which was particularly strong in Genoa). Yet he had nothing but contempt for Mussolini, who with his Blackshirts had seized the reins of power in 1922. In 1926, Montale wrote to a friend, describing his situation in Genoa: "Here I am an outcast [he uses the English word] in every sense of the word. The Fascists have a firm grip on things

here; if you're not one of theirs, you can't live."

Finally, in 1927, he found work in a publishing firm in Florence, and there, two years later, he was appointed director of the Gabinetto Vieusseux, a private library and cultural center. Montale's first book, *Cuttlefish Bones*, had been published in 1925 and reissued in 1928. Still, in December 1938, Montale was dismissed as director of the library, which desperately needed government funds to survive and had no hope of getting them with a director who was not a

Italy in 1943 to oppose the Allied landings and the S.S. began rounding up the Italian Jews for transport to the camps. With the liberation of Florence in 1944, however, Montale's time of troubles came to an end. Recognition and suitable employment soon followed—a position as literary editor at *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's greatest newspaper, in 1948, and the publication, over the next two decades, of the poems that established his international reputation.

The three books of poetry—*Cuttlefish Bones*, *The Occasions*, and *The Storm, Etc.*—that made Montale a modern classic are not very bulky. Writing to a friend in 1939 about his second volume, he describes it as consisting of "50 poems of which 40 are short.... 1,131 lines compared to 1,600 in *Ossi*, 2,731 lines altogether; Leopardi wrote 3,996.... I'm behind by 1,654 lines but hope to die ahead." With the publication of *The Storm, Etc.* in 1957, he almost reached that goal; and he was to surpass it with a volume called *Satura*, published in 1971. But most of the lines, as well as most of the poems, are short. In Galassi's volume, the Italian text covers 187 pages, and many of them are at least half blank.

What this poetic oeuvre lacks in extent is more than amply compensated for by its density. These poems, though always compelling and often intensely lyrical, are mysterious, enigmatic. Montale was reacting violently against the long reign of nine-

teenth-century Romantic rhetoric; he was cutting and condensing. He later recalled that as a young man he wanted "to wring the neck of our old aulic language, even at the risk of a counter-eloquence."

And wring its neck he does. In startling contrast to the overripe eloquence, the exuberant rhetorical expansiveness, of predecessors such as Gabriele D'Annunzio, Montale's poetic statement seems concentrated to the point of abruptness, its lyrical phrases as much a challenge to the intellect as music to the ear, and its evocation of natural forces sharply exact and at the same time implicitly symbolic. Here, for example, is the final stanza of a poem titled "Encounter":



EUGENIO MONTALE BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

card-carrying Fascist. Montale turned his hand to translation on the grand scale. He had already published translations of individual poems by Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Cavafy, and Dylan Thomas, but in the ensuing years he turned out versions of plays by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Cervantes, and O'Neill, as well as of novels and stories by Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Bret Harte, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Kay Boyle, and Dorothy Parker.

The years of the Second World War were spent in Florence, where, in the winter of 1943–44, he sheltered in his apartment the writers Carlo Levi and Umberto Saba, who had to go underground when German troops occupied

Then nothing more. Drowned one,
you disappear
the way you came and I know nothing
of you.
Your life is still your own: already scattered
amid the day's few glimmers.
Pray for me now
that I may come down by another route
than a city street
in the brown air, ahead of the press
of the living; and may I feel you with me,
may I
come without cowardice.

Yet the challenging tone of Montale's lyrical discourse is modulated by the frame in which it is enclosed. Nearly every poem is an address to another person: presumably, in some of the early poems, the reader; but later on, as is clear from the grammatical forms of the qualifying adjectives, a woman (as in the excerpt above, where "drowned one" is *sommersa*). She is addressed as *tu*, the Italian second person singular, the pronoun (with corresponding forms of possessive adjective and verb) used when speaking to a family member, a close friend, a lover, an inferior such as a servant, and God (as in early seventeenth-century English: "for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me").

Often the woman whom Montale had in mind must be inferred from the characteristics suggested by the lines (or learned from Montale's voluminous correspondence with his friends). Sometimes she is called by a name, but not by her real name. She is given what the Provençal poets called a *senhal*, a nickname, a code name, used to address a lady, a patron, a friend.

There are three such names in Montale's poems. The first, Arletta, appeared only once in the text, in the first separate printing of the poem from *Cuttlefish Bones* quoted above; but in the book it was replaced by the adjective *sommersa*. From the poet's correspondence, however, we know of many passages in the poems where Arletta is invoked, and also that her real name was Anna degli Uberti; she was a nineteen-year-old girl when he first made her acquaintance at Monterosso. She remained for him over the years a haunting presence in the memory, a dominant figure in the early poems who, to quote Galassi's wonderful essay "Reading Montale," "re-emerges in Montale's last work as the Ur-beloved, his first and most enduring amorous object."

A second female icon is given the name Clizia, which does appear in the poems as well as in Montale's correspondence. The *senhal* name is the Italian form of the Latin name of a nymph, Clytie, whose story is told in the *Meta-*

morphoses of Ovid. Scorned by the Sun-god, with whom she has fallen deeply in love, she wastes away in despair and turns into a heliotrope, a flower which, as its Greek name proclaims, turns to follow the course of the sun. Montale's Clizia is clearly based on Irma Brandeis, an American professor of Italian literature who came to visit him in Florence in the early 1930s and left Italy in 1938 when Mussolini announced the racial laws that brought Italy into line with the anti-Semitic policy of Hitler, whom he had fêted in Florence in the spring of that year.

"The identification with Brandeis," Galassi sums up, "has long been accepted: Clizia's character and characteristics—her Jewishness, her style of dress, her forehead and bangs—are all Brandeis's." This identification is ratified also by the frequent association of her presence in the poems with fire and ice, the two components of her German name. Still, as Galassi goes on to point out, Clizia is "a figure who metamorphoses as she is developed and revealed, and she is clearly derived from literary as well as experiential sources," from other women whom Montale had known as well as the "I.B." to whom he dedicated *The Occasions*, as well as literary figures—Galassi suggests a long list, beginning with Dante's Beatrice and ending with "Plato's (and Hölderlin's) Diotima."

Both these figures are presented in the poems as objects of amorous adoration, but there is never a hint of erotic sensuality. They often appear, in fact, as angelic presences, Clizia especially, to whom the poet appeals for help, for rescue from his despair; and who eventually seems to sacrifice herself to save him. But the third and final woman's *senhal* is Volpe, meaning Vixen. She is, by contrast, a "profane" figure.

This figure first appears in the section of *The Storm, Etc.* titled "Flashes and Inscriptions," and she is addressed as Volpe in the section called "Private Madrigals." We know from Montale's correspondence that she is based on a woman identified only as "G.B.H." whom he saw in 1948 on his visits to London, where she was working in a travel agency, and also on the young poet Maria Luisa Spaziani, whom he met in 1949. Volpe, as Galassi notes, is derived, like Clizia, from multiple sources, "literary and cultural as well as personal." He cites Montale himself on the matter: "Too many events are mixed up in the 'Flashes' for one to be able to read them autobiographically. The most one can say is that the character in the 'Madrigals' is a counterfigure to Clizia in a profane key, but Clizia had died or disappeared forever."

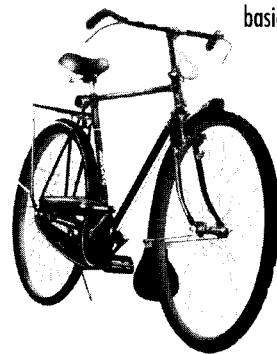
These female presences—the memory of a charming young girl, the fascination of a mature woman who admired his poetry, both of them idealized, almost religious visions, and the sensual appeal of the "Vixen"—dominate the landscapes of his mind and play their parts in the spiritual drama of the three books, which, as Montale himself hinted, could be read as a novel, or, as Galassi puts it in his enlightening essay, as poems that describe "a complete arc, one of the greatest in modern literature." But there are other women who appear, often in poems dedicated to them and under their real names: Dora Markus, Gerti (Gertrude Frankl), Liuba (Blumenthal).

Like Montale in Genoa, these women were "outcasts" in the Europe of the Fascists. And there were other grounds for sympathy, too. All three of them, like Irma Brandeis, were Jews. As early as 1925, Montale had written to a friend: "In Milan I'm thought to be Jewish, because of the Svevo 'case.' If it were possible to be Jewish without knowing it, this would be my case; such is my capacity for suffering, and my sense of the ark, more than 'home,' made of a few affections and memories that could follow me everywhere, unobscured."

These masterly poems present a translator with formidable challenges.

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Montale's poetic voice, the product of his desire to be "harsh and essential," is so densely packed with meaning that re-statement in another language often imposes a choice among the multiple connections and suggestions that emanate from Montale's often surprising combinations and evocative imagery. His vocabulary is another problem: some of his words are neologisms of his own invention, and dialect forms—Genoese, Tuscan, Ligurian—add a local, familiar flavor that is untranslatable. The language is also dense with literary allusion, significant echoes of his predecessors—Dante above all, but also Petrarch, Foscolo, Leopardi, and D'Annunzio—which disappear in translation and can only be indicated by footnotes.

And yet, in the work of talented translators, the essential qualities of Montale's poetic voice—above all, the vivid, concrete images that have cosmic resonance—can be preserved, as in the two versions that follow. All that is missing is the verbal music, the intricate pattern of rhyme and rhythm that made the following poem one that, until recently, Italian children learned by heart in school. The first version is by William Arrowsmith, a talented translator of Euripides and Aristophanes, as well as the author of a classic translation of the *Satyricon* of Petronius, who in his last years produced translations of work by Pavese, Antonioni, and Montale. His versions of Montale's first three volumes, published by Norton, appeared in 1985, 1987, and 1993.

The poem, untitled, is from *Cuttlefish Bones*. Here is Arrowsmith's version:

I have often met the evil of living:
the gurgle of the strangled brook,
the papering of the parched leaf,
the fallen horse, dying.

Of good I found little more than the omen
disclosed by the divine Indifference:
the statue in the drowsing
noon, and the cloud, and the hawk soaring.

And here is Galassi's version:

Often I've encountered evil:
it was the stream that chokes and roars,
the shriveling of the scorched leaf,
the fallen horse.

I knew no good, beyond the prodigy
that reveals divine Indifference:
it was the statue in the drowsiness
of noon, and the cloud, and the hawk
that soars.

Arrowsmith's "evil of living" is exact, and so are his "gurgle" (for *gorgoglia*) and "strangled" (for *strozzato*). His "papering" is an audacious metaphor, but it preserves the audacity of the original, for *incartocciare* means "to wrap

something in paper." Yet there is no warrant in the Italian for the horse "dying." Arrowsmith's "omen" is a possible reading of *prodigio*, but not its normal sense.

The difference between Arrowsmith's "disclosed by" and Galassi's "reveals" stems from the ambiguity of Montale's text; it can be read either way. Galassi's "I knew no good" is exact (and more emphatic than Arrowsmith's "little more than"), and his "it was" in the seventh line, echoing the same phrase in the second line, gives some idea of Montale's obsessive repetition of the Italian equivalent *era*, which occurs four times, in lines 2, 3, 4, and 7. Galassi also, with his "soars" in the final line, rhyming with "roars" in line 2 (and the off-rhyme with "horse" in line 4), gives some idea of the richness and the subtlety of Montale's technique in this short poem.

As in the case of most great poetry, one translation is never enough. Galassi's new version is indispensable; it has all three books in one handy volume—Italian text and accomplished translation—as well as an exhaustive commentary that draws on Montale's correspondence and the huge body of criticism and interpretation by critics writing in Italian and English, not to mention his superb essay that introduces these splendid but initially daunting poems. Ideally, of course, the reader should also have Arrowsmith to hand; his versions will often enrich the understanding of the poems by revealing some aspect that Galassi, faced with a choice between double or even multiple meanings, had to discard.

The publication of Montale's third volume, *The Storm, Etc.*, in 1957, was not the end of his poetic career. In 1971 he published *Satura*, followed by *Diario del '71 e del '72* in 1973 and *Quaderno di Quattro Anni* (*Notebook of Four Years*) in 1977, and in 1981, just before his death, a short collection entitled *Altri Versi* (*Other Poems*). Little of this work has so far appeared in English; but Arrowsmith, shortly before his death in 1992, completed his translation of *Satura*, which has now appeared.

These poems reveal a very different Montale. The title is a Latin word which, though Juvenal used it to describe his *Satires*, originally designated a sacrificial offering of mixed foods, and so came to be used of any miscellaneous mixture of ingredients—a medley, a hodge-podge. Montale's voice in *Satura* is very different from his voice in the earlier work; it is now humorous, satiric, parodic, mischievous, but sometimes, as in the poems of the opening section "Xenia," tender.

Most of these poems are devoted to a

woman who is almost completely absent from the first three books, though she is the woman with whom Montale had lived since the spring of 1939, and whom he married, in both a civil and a religious ceremony, in October 1963, a few months before her death. He first met her in Florence in 1927, and wrote about her in a letter to Svevo in Trieste: "I have made the acquaintance here of a charming [*simpatica*] and intelligent admirer of yours, close relative of your acquaintance (and friend?) Dr. E. Tanzi. This ex-Miss Tanzi has married the art critic Matteo Marangoni, and has the bizarre name Drusilla." Drusilla was the name of the sister of the Roman emperor Caligula, whom he loved so much (some people thought too well) that when she died he proclaimed her a goddess (he had previously announced that he himself was a god), decreed mourning throughout the Roman empire, and set up a temple with priests for her worship (under the name Panthea).

In 1929, Montale rented a room in the house of Drusilla and Matteo Marangoni, where he lived until April 1939, when he moved to a different apartment, taking Drusilla with him. She is referred to in the "Xenia" poems as "Mosca," or "fly"; it is not a *senhal*, a code name for an absent ideal love, but an affectionate nickname for a familiar, beloved presence. These poems are about loss: "the wanting you back,/ if only in one gesture,/ one habit of yours." And about loneliness: "Your arm in mine, I've descended a million stairs at least,/ and now that you're not here, a void yawns at every step." And about her "wild peals of laughter," and her defiant gallows humor, joking with her surgeon: "Just like you: even on the edge of the precipice/sweetness and horror fused in a single music."

After the "Xenia" poems, the tone changes radically. In fact, they are preceded by one of Montale's slyest, most sardonic barbs, a retort to the critics who have been explicating his texts in ever more complicated analyses. It is called simply "*Il Mio Tu*"—"My You" in Arrowsmith (though it is of course the familiar "thou").

Misled by me,
the critics keep on saying
that my *you* is standard practice.
If it were not for this foible of mine,
they would have known
that in me the many are one,
though seemingly
multiplied by mirrors. . . .

So much for the critics.

And there are other poems in *Satura* that deal with his own poetic concerns—

for example, the problem facing every Italian poet, the fact that, as John Ciardi once pointed out, "in Italian it is only a slight exaggeration to say that everything rhymes with everything else or a variant form of it."

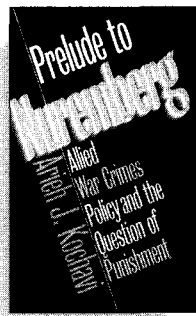
Rhymes are pests, worse
than the nuns of St. Vincent, knocking at
your door
nonstop. You can't just turn them away
and they're tolerable so long as they're
outside.
The polite poet stays aloof, disguising
and outwitting them (the rhymes),
or trying to sneak
them by. But they're fanatical, blazing
with zeal and sooner or later they're back
(rhymes
and biddies) pounding at your door
and poems,
same as always.

The Italian text is a fine example of how the polite poet stays aloof, disguising or outwitting the rhymes. It has only two full disyllabic end rhymes in the whole poem, the first and the last, and they are both of them a little odd. The first one, *delle*, is in fact rather outrageous: it is a form of the definite article, the equivalent of ending a line with "the"; and the second, *quella*, is a pronoun—"them," as in "it's always them." The total effect is rather comic.

Toward the end of *Satura*, however, the theme of Mosca returns: "Whenever you show up, it's always/in that red bed jacket of yours, your eyes/slightly puffy, like those of someone who has seen." He thinks of her, too, in the silence of a general strike that paralyzes traffic in the city: "Even the dead have started agitating./They're part of the total silence too./You're underground. No point arousing you,/you're always awake. Even today,/in the universal sleep."

The poems of the collections published after *Satura* are as accomplished, as darkly witty, as fascinating as anything in *Satura*; but translations of them are hard to find. Rosanna Warren reports that Arrowsmith's papers also contained translations of "every volume of poems by Eugenio Montale arranged by the poet himself" (except, of course, those already published by Norton). Yet no translation of the later poems has so far appeared. It is to be hoped that these Englished poems will appear soon, for these collections are full of treasures.

Here is one, the last poem of *Diario del '72*, translated by Joseph Brodsky in "In the Shadow of Dante," his magnificent essay on Montale that appears in his collection of essays *Less than One*, in which he speaks of the "fugitive beauty of this subtle, muttering, and yet firm stoic voice, which tells us that the world



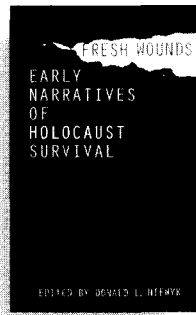
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ends with neither a bang nor a whimper but with a man talking, pausing and then talking again. When you have had such a long life, anticlimax ceases to be just another device."

To Conclude

I charge my descendants (if I have any) on the literary plane, which is rather improbable, to make a big bonfire of all that concerns

my life, my actions, my non-actions. I'm no Leopardi, I leave little behind me to be burnt, and it's already too much to live by percentages. I lived at the rate of five per cent; don't increase the dose. And yet it never rains but it pours.

BERNARD KNOX is the author of *The Oldest Dead White European Males* (Norton) and *Backing into the Future* (Norton).

Beneath the Skin

BY ALAN WOLFE

A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America by Shelby Steele

(HarperCollins, 185 pp., \$24)

Liberalism, Shelby Steele argues in his new book, met its greatest test on the issue of race—and failed it. In the early days of our concern with civil rights, liberalism "was far more preoccupied with freedom than with virtue." The purpose of its attack on legally enforced segregation "was to give individuals the freedom to agent their own lives regardless of their race, class, or sex." This kind of liberalism made individual autonomy its central value. "From the abolitionists to the suffragettes to the civil rights workers," Steele writes, "the struggle of freedom-focused liberalism was *not* to free oppressed groups so much as to free the individuals within those groups—to prevent society from using the group to oppress the individual."

In the aftermath of the 1960s, by contrast, liberal whites, holding their own race responsible for racism, began to seek redemption for themselves rather than equality for blacks. As they did, liberalism became "not a discipline of individual freedom but an ideology of conspicuous racial and social virtuousness." Race was the chosen arena in which liberal whites would prove their moral sincerity. Policies would be judged not by their promotion of racial justice, but by their ability to make whites feel that they were well-meaning. This was a symbolic liberalism, seeking what Steele calls "iconographic racial reform." Whether or not the policies sought by liberals achieved concrete results was irrelevant; all that mattered was for such policies to "function as icons of their high motivations."

Such a transformed liberalism served the purposes of a black leadership as prepared to play the role of redeemer as whites were to be cast as sinners. In these racial theatrics, black leaders turned their back on anti-discrimination legislation and black development and became "something of a grievance elite." By insisting that racism was embedded in the very structure of American society—and that any disparities between blacks and whites were the result of this racism—they sought programs that would intervene in society to alter radically the structures at fault.

Whatever the intentions of such interventionism in theory, in practice it became a form of racial patronage. Whites could prove their sincerity by admitting more blacks into selective educational institutions or onto corporate boards, and blacks would stand in judgment of how many sins were thus expiated. There isn't much real black power in all this, but there isn't much white redemption either. In Steele's angry view, whites and blacks enter into their awful bargain for the illusion of what each professes to want.

California's Proposition 209, which abolished the use of race as a factor in public sector jobs and college admissions, made clear what had previously been obscure: the relative paucity of highly qualified black high school graduates in that state—or, indeed, in the whole country. In insisting that the top universities in California nonetheless have an obligation to insure racial diversity, supporters of affirmative action defined the problem, according to Steele,

not as poor black performance, but as continued white resistance. To strip from blacks the consequences of their failure, however, is to deprive them of what affirmative action provides for whites: an opportunity for redemption.

Thus blacks must fail for affirmative action to succeed, and they must continue to fail for affirmative action to be retained. Indeed, Steele believes, white supporters of affirmative action are singularly uninterested in areas of life, such as jazz, in which blacks have succeeded quite well without their help. In thus denying that blacks are agents of their own destiny, affirmative action is a policy premised on black inferiority. At times Steele makes his argument even stronger: affirmative action implies white superiority, for it provides a way to define and to manage the problem of race so that whites are in charge.

And not just affirmative action. This newer form of liberalism rooted in shame and redemption first emerged during the Great Society. It lay at the heart of a welfare regime that perpetuated black poverty. It was responsible for the decision of a company such as Texaco to pay \$176 million to avoid being stigmatized as racist. It affects otherwise sensible writers such as Nathan Glazer who, in Steele's view, has come to endorse the paternalism of the liberals whom he once effectively criticized. Even the most conservative Republicans cannot immunize themselves against the politics of redemption.

Steele's America is a place in which just about everyone is incapable of standing up and treating black Americans as individuals whose race is one of the least important things about them. "A society is very dangerous to itself when it has to bear an undeniable shame," Steele writes; and to demonstrate its true remorse, America is driven to violate its most sacred principles. The iconographic politics of race in that sense threatens not just liberalism, but America itself.

Something did indeed happen to liberalism in the aftermath of the 1960s, and Steele is right to judge it momentous. Just as the rise of the welfare state transformed a liberalism that had once been committed to economic freedom, the introduction of identity politics and multiculturalism shifted the focus of numerous liberals from the rights of individuals to the properties of groups. One need not be an opponent of affirmative action to understand it as charting a very different course than the anti-discrimination provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Indeed, defenders of affirmative action often take the

lead in arguing for the necessity of a positive role for government in the fight against racial injustice, thereby acknowledging that the traditional liberal concern with protecting rights against government was insufficient.

Not only is this newer form of liberalism worthy of sustained attention, it is also deserving of vigorous criticism. In their haste to micro-manage institutions to insure what they deemed to be morally proper outcomes, too many liberals turned a cold shoulder to the procedural safeguards and the individualistic ideals that gave liberalism its glory. Racism has been America's great shame, but it does not follow that the end of insuring diversity in universities and workplaces justifies the means used to produce it. Surely we will come to remember the present period as one in which we allowed our zeal to do the right thing in matters of race to overcome our commitment to the principle that everyone ought to play by the same rules and be held to the same standards.

The publication of Shelby Steele's *The Content of Our Character* in 1990 introduced a passionate and powerful voice into America's debates over race. Fearless in its insistence on individual dignity and willing to confront directly the group-think that passes for solidarity, Steele's eloquent voice was piercingly honest. Typical of the book's power was its discussion of "integration shock"—the sudden doubts on the part of newly middle-class black Americans that they may not be up to the challenge of living outside the familiar world of racial separatism. Perhaps, Steele suggested, the exaggerated sense of racial pride—"the swaggering teenager with his gold chains and suitcase-sized ghetto blaster; the 'sister' with an insouciant don't-play-with-me attitude; the black college professor with conspicuously perfect elocution and a Latinate vocabulary; the black dock worker who polishes his fingernails; the above-it-all attitude of 'cool' that makes the presence of emotional distance a virtue; the magnificent egoism of a Muhammad Ali"—was a form of "compensatory grandiosity" designed to cover secret fears rather than to express newly found confidence.

Any writer who could write the way Shelby Steele wrote about his own race was asking for trouble. Yet *The Content of Our Character* was not an angry book. It was generous in its praise of other black writers, including William Julius Wilson; and its criticism of affirmative action was strict but measured. Steele's new book contains some of the power of *The Content of Our Character*. He is correct, alas, that a concern with rights and

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Votive

The wind's offshore.
It hollows out each swell,
rips spray—back-hanging, gone.

Forget the rivers and the native land,
the dream of justice, even between
three or two,
swept clear.

This crowded
still it gives back memory, the sea.

And love too steadies the gaze.

"As for what lasts, the poets set it down."

•
The bullet, scarfed under the current,
fleshed, alive,

rind-red.

No-one would keep us.

•
Branched-through, everywhere unwritten
black stem earthed in.

Your want willed,
reknotted. Time.

•
The underhang picked bare.

Faster.

Where the tracks had been.

•
It finds us out, sees further (sifting),
cut against the swell of.

Sapphire. Side by side.

•
So bodied, blameless—blamed.
What were we waiting for?

•
The slope called back out of the root-surge.

Undergone, I knew you.

From the single keel.

•
I knew you.

PETER SACKS

equality has been transformed into a concern with sin and redemption. He is correct also in his insistence that any such transference is potentially harmful to democracy. And yet Steele's new book disappoints.

This is partly because we have already heard its message. "Blacks felt anger, white liberals felt guilt, and when they came together, blacks would vent their anger by haranguing the whites, who often allowed themselves to be scourged as a kind of penance": this fine epitome of *A Dream Deferred* can be found in *The Content of Our Character*. But the problem goes deeper. Steele's new book is less a personal essay and more an analysis of the politics of race; but the strengths of the essayist are rarely those of the analyst.

For a start, any comparison between a newer form of liberalism and an older one has to have the history right, and historical analysis is not Steele's strength. The redemptive politics that Steele associates with post-1960s liberalism is a recurring phenomenon in American history. Steele's claim that earlier civil rights advocates such as the abolitionists sought "freedom-focused" gains for individuals is wildly off-base; some abolitionists were incapable of imagining freed slaves as liberal citizens possessing rights, and others brought to a state of perfection the very kind of redemptive, symbolic, and quite illiberal politics that Steele professes to abhor. Political phenomena do not appear out of thin air. Affirmative action and other forms of group-based politics could not have become pervasive in recent decades without real roots in American political and cultural history.

It is also puzzling to find Steele defending an older form of liberalism, because he is not a liberal. I do not mean to criticize Steele for being a conservative; but he is a particular kind of conservative. For all of his political passion, Steele is oddly passive about his conservatism. "To be called a black conservative is, in fact, to be one," he writes somewhat plaintively in the opening chapter of his book, as if his opponents are so powerful that they define his politics for him.

And his conservatism is entirely reactive. It is not sufficient for Steele to say, as he does, that it is conservatives today who are the ones most likely to advocate the principles behind the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That is a matter of political reality, not philosophical commitment. One searches through his book for a positive vision of a good society—liberal or conservative—against which redemptive liberals can be contrasted, and one

finds only a few passing references to individual freedom which are strikingly devoid of content. Without a grounding in any firm set of ideas, Steele's criticism of the new liberalism floats too freely, and relies too much on its rhetoric.

Yet the strangest aspect of Steele's attack on redemptive liberalism is the redemptive quality of Steele's conservatism. It is certainly more the expression of a mood than a movement. And the mood is not very attractive. Liberalism, after all, is not only an ideology or a politics; it is also a way of thinking about the world. At its best, the liberal mentality is capacious, pluralistic, measured, experimental. But the tone of *A Dream Deferred* is not at all like that. It is prophetic, hermetic, suspicious. When he charges those who adhere to a politics of shame with illiberalism, therefore, Steele is indirectly saying that they have come to resemble people like himself.

Redemptive liberals, according to Steele, adhere to what he infelicitously calls "ulteriority." The announced goals of a program—say, encouraging diversity—always take second place to an ulterior goal such as demonstrating sincerity. "Ulteriority has given American racial policy a decidedly 'postmodern' feel," Steele continues. "Its subtext is more important than its text, and we read this subtext for its representation of justice." Even if programs fail to deliver their promises—indeed, even if they turn out to be quite damaging—liberals continue to support them, for what counts above all else is the purity of intention. Thus redemptive liberalism is psychological rather than economic or political; motives count more than measures. "Because the redemptive liberal is cowed by his own lack of moral authority as a white, he is far hungrier for it than for either logic or truth." That is why redemptive liberals are given to political correctness: when their essentially religious passion runs its course, all they have left are incantations of belonging.

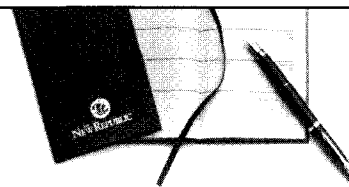
Liberalism is undermined by a propensity toward suspicion. If we constantly search each other for evidence of ulterior motives, we cannot engage in the straightforward give-and-take of ideas that makes compromise possible. Steele is not the only intellectual who, in our moralizing culture, has raised questions about affirmative action and as a consequence found his motives questioned; I venture to suggest that anyone who has publicly expressed doubts about the policy has been called racist on more than one occasion. That is why I find it so painful to see Steele making his argument in terms of motives.

Steele's treatment of William Julius

Wilson provides an illustration of his illiberalism. His previous references to Wilson as one of several "critical voices" are replaced here by a discussion of the ways in which Wilson's work embodies what Steele calls, again infelicitously, "specimenization." This sort of research, according to Steele, treats blacks as specimens by blaming their condition on large social forces and then calling for government intervention to soften or to obliterate those forces. As a practitioner of specimenization, Wilson knows in advance what he wants to find and is therefore "really an ideologue working under the imprimatur of social science." Researchers such as Wilson are also entrepreneurs, constantly seeking grants and proposing public policies—and in this way they practice the politics of redemption by other means, for their work is designed to show "blacks as helpless, their fate contingent on white intervention...." Anything but a rigorous social scientist, "the specimenizing social scientist tries to seduce society's goodwill by presenting the variable as an opportunity for good works."

As this account of Wilson makes clear, Steele practices the same art of ulteriority for which he criticizes liberals, evaluating Wilson's work not by its announced objectives, but for what he presumes it to reveal about Wilson's intentions. He seems determined to use the Wilson of his imagination as a way of demonstrating his conservative sincerity in ways eerily similar to those used by supporters of affirmative action to rally around their cause. The actual Wilson, the one who marshals data and makes an argument, never appears in Steele's book. Steele does not discuss Wilson's statistics; he never quotes from Wilson's book. We have instead an ulterior villain, whose ideas are reduced to the political objectives that Steele divines in them.

Steele contrasts Wilson's views with those of Bill Stephney, the cofounder of the rap group Public Enemy, who blames welfare for the plight of the inner-city poor. "Why can someone like Bill Stephney, a rapper and a businessman, see so vividly what one of America's preeminent social scientists overlooks?" In asking the question, Steele means to make the point, reiterated throughout his book, that practitioners of redemptive liberalism have lost sight of reality. Now, there is a point to be made here, for liberalism at its best is willing to test its ideas experimentally against the world, and to revise them to account for discordant realities—precisely the kind of methodological openness so often missing among the most passionate defenders of affirmative action. Yet this is not a



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point that Steele can credibly make. Give Wilson this much: he assembles facts in an effort to persuade.

This willingness to test ideas against reality makes Wilson's books, despite their flaws, far more valuable than the musings of, say, Cornel West. Shelby Steele, by contrast, is almost a conservative version of Cornel West, a writer who relies on a prophetic style designed to convince the already persuaded rather than one who marshals evidence and analysis. There are enough post-modernists willing to believe that, in the absence of any firm truths, the opinions of rappers are just as valid as those of social scientists; it is very jarring to see Shelby Steele among them.

Prophetic writers dramatize reality more than they try to capture it. What they gain is the ability to appeal to the emotions, as indeed Steele does when his prose is at its most incandescent. But what they lose is the rigor of argument and the capacity to make nuanced distinctions—a capacity that is especially necessary in the discussion of emotional topics. And there is no more emotional topic in America than the topic of race.

Steele wants us to believe that redemptive liberalism is the “second” betrayal of black freedom. The first betrayal was slavery and segregation, sometimes linked together by Steele as if they were the same thing. “Both have been essentially atavistic and antidemocratic worlds in which race has been legitimized as a criterion for discrimination and as a source of entitlement in clear defiance of every democratic principle.” One hardly knows what to make of this claim. Slavery and legal segregation did indeed violate democratic principles, which is why they eventually could not be allowed to persist in a society committed to equal rights for all. Affirmative action and other forms of redemptive liberalism are in many ways illiberal; but if they are adhered to, as Steele claims, by conservatives as well as liberals and permeate into every aspect of American life, how can they possibly be anti-democratic?

The notion that slavery and affirmative action can be compared along any dimension is ludicrous. Steele seems to know this, but he makes the comparison anyway. “No doubt the second world is easier on everyone than the first,” he writes, “but it is not fundamentally different.” Easier? It is easier on people not to hang them—or even to prevent them from using bathrooms or sleeping in motels; but the evils of slavery and segregation had nothing to do with making things hard on people. Their evil lay in the fact that they deprived individuals of

elementary dignity, if not of their lives. Not fundamentally different? If freedom of the person is not fundamental, then there are no fundamentals.

Yet Steele will not give up the analogy. The racial preferences eliminated by Proposition 209 in California were an arrangement that “duplicated precisely that of slavery, where black fate was indeed in white hands.” “In segregation, and certainly in slavery, whites used their agency over black life to assert their superiority,” Steele writes at another point. “In redemptive liberalism they use it to assert their redemption.” Steele even suggests that in one way redemptive liberalism is worse than segregation, for whereas the segregationist was indifferent to black agency, the redemptive liberal “actually argues *against* the viability of black agency in order to engage white agency.” It is not Shelby Steele's strength to buttress his argument by citing other people's work, but if he had made use of the bitingly powerful analysis of racial segregation in Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom's *America in Black and White*, he might have been dissuaded from such rhetorical overkill.

Not only does Steele compare contemporary liberals to segregationists and defenders of slavery, he also argues that both “betray” black freedom. Liberalism cannot easily survive charges of betrayal. I find many of those who argue in favor of affirmative action disingenuous, inconsistent, and even at times demagogic, all of which qualities make for a frustrating public discussion. Still, it is clear to me that they are defending a commitment to racial justice as they understand it, no matter how misguided I sometimes feel that they are. (I wish that they extend the same understanding to me.) To believe that they are betraying a cause that we both profess to honor is the first step toward treating them not as fellow citizens of a liberal society, but as enemies unworthy of membership in that society. And if one thinks, as Steele does, that this betrayal involves nearly everyone—liberal and conservative alike—then one has all but proclaimed oneself a remnant, alone in the truth that he has not betrayed while everyone else around him is corrupt and dishonest. Shelby Steele's dream is not a dream deferred. It is a dream destroyed; and he imagines himself walking around in the wreckage, telling those who will listen to him of the brave few who tried to prevent the damage but were finally too powerless to stop it.

Affirmative action, in its insistence that a new set of rules can change the world by questioning the motives that people bring to the deci-

sions of daily life, resembles those grand schemes for planning in an uncertain world which conservatives have long distrusted. Here is a policy that seems tailor-made to the conservative critique of contemporary America: fashioned by a “new class” of judges and bureaucrats, promulgated over the opposition of the great majority of working people, defended by tenured radicals, unable to be modified or reformed except by dramatic events such as Proposition 209. Affirmative action, from a conservative point of view, is liberalism in its most extreme—as well as most vulnerable—form. But Steele's book is not only about affirmative action. It is also about the “identity politics” that lies behind it. And reading his book, one wonders whether a conservative critique of the multiculturalist strain in contemporary race discourse is even possible.

There have been numerous liberal criticisms of the trend toward identity politics. What makes them persuasive is the conviction that excessive preoccupation with group identity violates liberalism's insistence on universality. But what conservative goals does strong racial identification violate? To be sure, it assigns people to categories determined by circumstances of their birth over which they have no control, but such a received ranking, albeit with respect to class or social standing rather than race, is historically one of the definitions of conservatism. If Steele is correct, such racialism may also introduce a new form of inequality in which the formerly oppressed are on top—but who are conservatives to oppose hierarchy? The language of identity politics aspires to postmodernism, but in its depiction of the world as divided into rigid groups staking claims for their piece of society's pie, it actually resembles pre-modern political arrangements such as feudalism—the very kind of inherited tradition of collective self-definition and social inequality that conservatism was developed to defend. Listen to passionate advocates of identity politics talk about the need for single-sex colleges or dormitories determined by race: you will be immediately transported not to some future utopia, but to America before the 1960s.

Not all conservatives, especially in America, defend tradition. Some of them, if not most of them, are attracted to the market and its emphasis on individual choice, and they are consequently distrustful of an active role for the state. Yet markets today are not local and homogeneous; they are global and diverse. And for this reason, perhaps, one also finds among the advocates of

strong racial identification a surprising suspicion of national citizenship and a fervent defense of cultural globalization.

Multiculturalists do not defend a strong conception of citizenship that requires sharply defined borders and patriotic symbols of national unity. Their postmodern suspicion undermines such contemporary liberal ideals as national educational standards, the welfare state, and strong public health measures just as much as libertarianism. Indeed, multiculturalists and libertarians share the sense that government unjustifiably "privileges" one set of moral ideals over another. Shelby Steele may be right to criticize Texaco for its quick capitulation to Jesse Jackson, but the more important point is the easy way in which corporations that love the market and advocates of strong racial identification find themselves speaking the same language. It was not liberal willingness to expiate sins that led the company to an agreement, but rather primal instincts to protect turf—corporate on the one hand, ethnic on the other.

Multiculturalism is flourishing in America not least because it fits so well with these conservative proclivities. Like conservatives, advocates of identity politics demand no changes in human nature. By insisting on the role that racial identity plays in determining one's outlook on the world, they see much of the world, governed by hidden structures, as unchangeable at its core. Yet liberal attacks on identity politics at least are consistent: the rules are held to apply to all, without regard for surface differences.

Conservative criticisms of multiculturalism invariably come across as unprincipled, if not ruthless, because they leave the impression that the systemic advantages of the powerful and the privileged will suddenly be nullified or taken away when efforts are made to use them to protect the formerly excluded. No wonder that a black conservative such as Steele describes himself as lonely. (His longest chapter is called "The Loneliness of the 'Black Conservative.'") His ideological comrades generally manage to leave the impression that what the conservative really objects to is not unfairness in general, but only those forms of unfairness that might result in the presence of racial minorities in institutions once dominated by whites.

No one can make that last charge against Shelby Steele. His commitment to equality between the races is fierce and unimpeachable. But it is precisely this commitment that renders his book so frustrating and incomplete. Since he turns his passion so exclusively against

advocates of identity politics, and only rarely against the conservatives who share so much with the multiculturalists, Steele squanders a valuable opportunity to accomplish one or both of two important tasks. One would be to break new ground by showing the ways in which conservatism might be brought to bear creatively on America's racial imbroglio. The other would be to talk honestly about what it is like to be a black conservative. Given that Steele does condemn at least one conservative treatment of race, *The Bell Curve*, as a work filled with "fascistic ideological implications," one longs for a treatment from him of what it is like to be torn between pride in his race and the occasional indifference, if not downright hostility, of some of his ideological soulmates.

Hence the final and most damaging comparison between Shelby Steele and those he attacks. "To uncover affirmative action, to look carefully into the suppositions on which it rests, is also to unveil at least one theme of my generation's vanity—our general willingness to have the glib, 'innovative' idea stand in for principle and difficult struggle." That is easy to say, but it is hard to do. Steele asserts vague and undeveloped principles when he invokes principles at all. And the struggle in his book

is never a struggle with himself or his ideology. Indeed, what strikes the reader most about *A Dream Deferred* is how much it accords with the very vanity of the generation from which Steele is trying to distance himself, for it amounts to little more than the constant reiteration of one interesting but ultimately glib idea.

Shelby Steele's new book appears at precisely the moment when America's debate over race is shifting dramatically. For years, advocates of diversity and affirmative action have appealed to the emotions, insisting that white America had to take dramatic steps to overcome its culpability in perpetuating racist norms and institutions. Whatever one thinks of *The Shape of the River*, William G. Bowen and Derek Bok's defense of affirmative action, at least it recognizes that confession is no substitute for hard data. It is a dispiriting irony that as one side in this debate recognizes that prophecy is not enough, someone from the other side resorts to the emotionalism displayed by Shelby Steele. The fact is that we still need facts. Their near-total absence from *A Dream Deferred* guarantees that the book will not produce the serious arguments against affirmative action that conservatives ought to be providing. •

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Discipline and Punish

BY ROBERT BOYERS

Last Vanities by Fleur Jaeggy translated by Tim Parks

(New Directions, 95 pp., \$11.95)

We have grown tired of decadence, and surely of what passes for decadence today. Coy, artificial, a mystification without mystery or transgressive power, it no longer inspires cults or effusions on the tonic effects of fetish objects. Instead we get only the unsubversive postures of subversion. Objects of art and style that are designed to seem diffident or nasty seem to most of us only quaint, willed, excessively literary. Works whose models were celebrated for their capacity to enthrall are more apt now to amuse, faint reminders of a time when representations of sex in a freshly dug grave had the power to provoke and to arouse.

Of course, there were always varieties of decadence. The perfumed, lushly tapestried concoctions of turn-of-the-century artists inspired by Huysmans or Wilde are so different in almost every way from the radical fantasies of later decadents such as Bataille as to call into question the very use of "decadence" as an analytical or descriptive category. And yet, in the pages that Huysmans devoted to Baudelaire in *À Rebours*, for example, there is a clear statement of qualities that do in fact continue to dominate what remains of the decadent imagination: the preference for "those districts of the soul where the monstrous vegetations of the sick mind flourish," for "the mind that has reached the October of its sensations"; the pervasive sense "of a despotic and freakish fate," of creatures "skilled in self-torment," of "ennui" and "lassitude." Alternative sensibilities are typically derided, by decadents of every stripe, for their "common sense," their sentimentality, their "moralizing inanities."

For Nietzsche, decadence had more to do with the promotion of an abrasive, comprehensive negativity than with the striking of perverse or violent or melancholic postures, though he was not averse to striking a few postures now and then. The *épatisme* inherent in

decadence still had a certain grandeur. It was an element in the struggle against what Nietzsche called "impoverished life," against "conventional morality" as a denial of life. Yet it was not long before critics began to notice what might be called the decadence of decadence. Adorno was alert to the phony appropriation of oppositional stances by twentieth-century artists pandering to a popular appetite for novelty, and Trilling carefully anatomized the process by which decadence—like other advanced forms—became a mode of accredited, therefore empty and debased, subversion.

This is not to say that decadence has disappeared as a temperament or an aesthetic phenomenon. The category still assists in the differentiation of one sort of work from another. Thus we recognize at once that Russell Banks's *Cloudsplitter*, for all the violence and the perversity of its central figure, is in no sense a decadent work, that its author takes no special pleasure in going against the grain of established moral tenets and has little feeling for the excitement thereby generated. Neither would anyone mistake for a decadent sensibility the dark, haunted, even suicidal cast of mind that permeates W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*. What James Wood has called the "internal wasting sickness" of Sebald's characters would, in the hands of a decadent writer, become the occasion for a kind of persistent, studied, ostentatious nihilism; but the quiet grandeur of Sebald's work has in part to do with his deep resistance to every kind of posturing.

This resistance is not apparent—not at first, not always—in the work of the Swiss writer Fleur Jaeggy. The author of four novels (only one of them, *Sweet Days of Discipline*, is available in English) and of a new collection of stories entitled *Last Vanities*, Jaeggy is unmistakably fascinated by decadence. She trades, persistently, in the standard moods and devices of the decadent imagination, and she invests in the cult of violence,

without claiming for it a moral or psychological purpose. Attracted to the aberrant and the irrational, Jaeggy pursues them sometimes for their own sake and sometimes for the sake of the effect that their expression will produce.

The familiar association between decadence and "sickness"—psychological, sexual, physiological—is ratified in her work, which features madness, murder, and persistent fantasies of revenge and dismemberment. It is characteristic of the sky in a Jaeggy fiction that it calls to mind "an infected sheet," of a child's eyes that they are filled with "menace," of ordinary domestic life that it is haunted by "the stealthy tread of catastrophe." A young girl allows herself to be caressed "like a corpse." The faces of boarders wear "a mortuary look." Daydreams are suffused with "trophies of poison and sorrow," "the dark green of the gloom," "palpable suffocating bodies."

The danger, of course, is that works drawn to such specifications will seem as trite and mechanical as the more comforting works drawn to what were once commonly called bourgeois specifications. When characters habitually harbor toward one another murderous sentiments, and are not much troubled by them, we can hardly feel that we are in the presence of a fresh and demanding view of human relations. When violence is routinely gratuitous, or patently inexplicable, it is likely to seem frivolous.

It is not that we do not believe in the reality of such instincts. We are perfectly willing, some of the time, to credit the fact that what happens—in a short story, in the apartment next door—may well be terrible and largely beyond our powers of explanation. In a work of fiction, however, we wish to feel that what we do not understand is nonetheless worth thinking about. We may rightly demand of material that ought, by its nature, to inspire vertiginous thoughts that it do no less.

One of the stories in *Last Vanities*—there are seven in all—involves a young mother who hates her new daughter, "hated her from the moment she appeared in the world," and cannot make up her mind whether or not to give the child to a wealthy couple still grieving from the loss of their own child. "No Destiny" is narrated in a third person, limited-omniscient perspective, much of it in the implied voice of the young mother. When we read that the garden was "white in winter. Dirty white," that "in spring it was dirtier still," we are hearing the dominant

narrative voice of the story and, at the same time, the peculiar sour voice of Marie Anne, the darkly unpleasant, embittered mother who often gives herself up "to her rage." When Marie Anne visits the home of the wealthy couple, and it is described as a "nice house" with a "nice garden," we feel the barely contained resentment expressed in the repetition of the complacent word "nice," and associate it with the perspective of the young woman herself. We are prepared, more or less at once, for a story about the disfiguring effects of envy, destitution, and vengeance.

Jaeggy mischievously inserts into the story a few stray elements to suggest that she is up to the sort of thing that we find in well-meaning, sensitive fictions alert to the miseries of the poor; but class is not at the root of Marie Anne's hatred of her daughter. No more is poverty the cause of her reflection, confronted with the dead infant's dolls, that "the little girl hadn't had time to smash in their faces or pull off their legs or maybe an arm." The malignity in the story is patently motiveless. It is directed not at the rich but at everything. It is pervasive and indiscriminate.

Nor is the malignity to be understood as a psychological condition, as a distortion of feeling with more or less determinate social causes. The wealthy couple, only faintly evoked, is almost as susceptible to depravity as Marie Anne and her friend Johanna. Celebrating what they take to be the imminent adoption of a replacement figure for their lost daughter, they "pull to bits" the children's dolls. The husband crouches down and has Marie Anne climb onto his back. The wife takes off her dress, and all of them play, so that "happiness bit into them like a burning blade." The mood is artificial, overheated. There is menace in the air, and it comes not from characters who are themselves the source of the disturbance, but from the foul ether that circulates freely through every passage of Jaeggy's brief story.

The decadence that we identify in "No Destiny" is not what, in the late nineteenth century, used to be known as *mal du siècle*, that mood of pervasive dissatisfaction which insisted that pleasure is finite and desire is insatiable. Neither does the decadence in Jaeggy have much to do with the exaltation of artifice and the deliberate denigration of nature that are so central to the poetry of Baudelaire. Jaeggy has no apparent interest in promoting particular ideas about nature or desire.

Neither does she wish to persuade us that the world is more or less as it appears in her fiction. Those for whom she writes, in a story such as "No Destiny," need no persuasion; they recognize in her an accent, an aroma, that seems to them authentic and bracing. They thrill to their poison.

There is no place within the terms of this compact for the earnest expression of carefully considered ideas or for the acknowledgment that reality is, for most persons, a very different matter. Good taste, in such a fiction, always demands that the dominant perspective seem irrefutable, that the obsessiveness of the central characters seem axiomatic, with no need to justify itself against any other standard of behavior. To explain or to qualify would be to disturb the mood of the fiction, to violate its carefully maintained opacity.

There is something haughty and peremptory in Jaeggy's fiction. For all the pressure of unrelieved anxiety that often permeates her work, its aura of torments undergone or anticipated, we never feel that the writer herself risks a loss of control. The peremptoriness is obvious in Jaeggy's unapologetic, even deliberately crude, plotting. Like other stories in *Last Vanities*, "No Destiny" abruptly terminates the main action and springs forward, within the space of the final paragraph, by at least a decade. Jaeggy's sovereign willingness to dispense with the niceties of ordinary narrative construction is evident also in a story called "Porzia," where an event that transpired twenty-five years before the main action is made to play a disproportionately large role in the unriddling of the narrative problem; or in "A Wife," where the young daughters of a family are suddenly, without transition of any kind, "sturdy" adolescents "ruled by instincts." No effort is made in these stories to justify the fast-forwards and the recursions. No reason is offered for the refusal to develop material in the indicated directions. Stories end where they end because that is what the writer has decreed.

Jaeggy writes with the confidence of someone for whom the perverse and the vacuous are always absorbing. If they seem to others pointlessly menacing or otherwise distasteful, that is perhaps what confers upon her own breezy mastery an air of brio and an arrogant singularity. She is aware, as she moves with severe aplomb from one unsavory tidbit to another, that she is administering little savaging shocks to our system, but she betrays no hint of discomfort herself. The elderly couple to whom a

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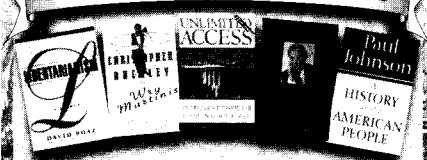
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pathetic bulldog is given in the story "Porzia" is said to have "then"—immediately—"poisoned the dog," but this occasions neither pause nor comment, and it is hard not to smile at such casual references to carnage or cruelty as they routinely succeed one another in this book. No more are we surprised that a small, troubling detail—the old couple's grandson is "bitterly" said to look "like a girl"—should quickly occasion a flurry of kindly conventional remarks, more or less out of nowhere. It is as if the story existed simply to liberate these small shocks and reversals, to play with the harsh thought that anything is possible and move right along.

Even reflection, what would elsewhere pass for thought, is here, in Jaeggy, an ephemeral disturbance in the stir of incident. The young woman who thinks that "when others die we become their masters and mistresses" is rather severely corrected by the narrator: "It has never occurred to her that the opposite might be true, that perhaps our lives are governed by them." But this correction has no force; the narrator might well have said something altogether different, for all the impact that the actual correction has on the development of the story. But Jaeggy is a writer who knows better than to invest in anything so easily contradicted and betrayed as an idea. Everything conceivably solid in her fiction is shot through with intimations of impermanence. The earnest statement, like the monstrous and the freakish, is only a short step removed from the put-on, the playful stab of nauseous whimsy.

Yet Jaeggy's best work is richer, more various than some of her stories would lead us to suspect. In the title story of *Last Vanities*, as in the novel *Sweet Days of Discipline*, we note that she is not invariably limited or defeated by her inordinate attraction to the splenetic or the nihilistic. Where, in a number of her stories, we get little more than mood, and static poignancies without depth, elsewhere we find a real talent for implication, a subtle modulation of sentiment and voice. In these writings, Jaeggy does not shrink from the suggestion that words and actions have weight.

Jaeggy is always recognizably a writer of an almost ascetic intensity, with a gift for the elliptical, the cryptic, the distracted; but these qualities amount to a great deal in a story such as "Last Vanities," where we have not a studied annulment of feeling but a curiously anxious inquisition. To be sure, it begins in the usual way. Reproach is said to "spread out like a foul-smelling fog." The principal characters loom "above these vapors, like evil spirits." The word

"dirty" is intoned frequently, and in its vicinity are words such as "soiled" and "smears," "warp" and "sinister." Later we find "rancor" and "revulsion," "the filth of sweetness," the "Death" that is "first and foremost something that contaminates." Here, again, is Jaeggy's appetite for the feral, the haunted, the mortuary.

Entering such a work, we are prepared to resist what is obviously overwrought—except that in this case resistance does not come easily. For Jaeggy's design here allows for a number of competing emphases. The destructive elements are anything but spurious, and they are in the service of something more than a thrill. "Last Vanities" revolves around an elderly Swiss couple who suddenly, for the first time in a fifty-year marriage, entertain murderous thoughts about one another. Kindly, honest, shy, these apparently exemplary octogenarians, "ever thankful to God," go through their customary household rituals, hoping to keep themselves safe from harm. Provincial, fastidious, Kurt and Verena Kuster have known all their lives how to banish torpor, grief, illness. But then the prospect of decline and death insinuates itself at last into their midst, and the *gemütlich* fastness of their retirement nest, the cozy adjacency of other apartments like their own or the couples next door conducting lives that "were the continuation of their lives," cannot protect them from the great fear.

So successfully does Jaeggy convey the inescapable panic that overtakes the husband that we accept at once his rapid transition from fear to suicide. The stages are brief, the motives more or less transparent. Afraid that his wife is ill and will soon die, and unable to live with the dark uncertainty of a loss that seems inescapably imminent, he throws himself from the window. His wife has watched him go through the final motions. She believes, afterward, that she "helped her husband to throw himself down from the window." In an imagined courtroom proceeding, she asks how she could "go on living with a man who was upset that she wasn't dead?"

In all of this it is not Kurt who commands our attention, it is Verena. It is she who observes, reflects, wonders. The fragmentary memories and the quotidian mysteries that flit lightly through the narrative are hers. The Kusters' brief honeymoon is, to us, her experience of marriage. ("The first night she felt like an actress, trying to perform what others had done....") The ignorance so central to a resolutely

provincial life is her ignorance. ("What did she know of the world, beyond the border?") Even the menace, the carefully deposited reminders of Jaeggy's attraction to the poisonous and the homicidal, are here marks of Verena's drifting and increasingly morbid imagination. It is she who stares at the laundry "turning in the glass" and thinks how "one fine day their bones would be as clean as fresh laundry."

For a person so long closed to all thought of death and decay, Verena comes to morbidity with a curious if entirely believable ease. We believe in that ease of transformation, as in other aspects of "Last Vanities," even if they do not conform to natural law. It is not the burden of Jaeggy's story to offer a theory of old age. Her characters move us not because we are inclined to think "I could be like that," but because they participate in a fully evolved metaphor in which every aspect of the story is implicated. It is a gorgeous metaphor of decline, in which love, fear, despair, flight, antipathy, and regret are intermixed, so that nothing in the story seems in the least extraneous, willed, unassimilated.

In this tale, the appurtenances of decadence are properly subordinated to other, larger purposes. Here the foul humors are neither generic trappings nor exotic contrivances. The vagrant touches of rot and rancor have their proportionally modest roles to play, and they are inextricably linked with competing accents of affection and contrition, in combinations that do not yield to formula. When, absorbed by the thought that she is responsible for her husband's death, Verena thinks "the murder was her prettiest embroidery ever," we do not hear in this the self-congratulating voice of a writer impressed by her own perversity. Instead the assorted vapors and smears are rooted in the mind of a profoundly disoriented woman. The bird perched on Verena's windowsill, with "something human about its face, the painted face of women in brothels," is not a static emblem of a corrupt world, but a vivid fraction of a mind also preoccupied by celestial courses, the precarious wave in her own "soft blue hair." The melancholy of "Last Vanities" is humane.

Jaeggy's spare, bleak, haunting novel, *Sweet Days of Discipline*, which appeared here in 1993, is a more troubling instance. Set in a postwar Swiss boarding school for girls, it betrays a nostalgia for decadence, for the effects that are still presumed to follow from the relentless plying of the void. A first-person fiction spoken by a young woman remember-

ing her captivity in a school that effectively deprived her of life, Jaeggy's novel has a refined though never precious air. It is, in its way, quite beautiful.

There is, throughout, the suggestion of madness, or at least fanaticism. Here and there we hear a distinct Nietzschean accent. There is the silence surrounding the name of God, the eloquence beyond good and evil, the gallows laughter. There is also the marked predilection for the lurid, the somewhat exaggerated intensifier: the narrator's girlhood is "senile"; the faces of her friends wear "a mortuary look"; the looming future is anticipated as "crimes I hadn't yet experienced." The atmosphere is thick with "aromas of servitude." The novel's opening page sets the action in an area where Robert Walser "used to take his many walks when he was in the mental hospital," an area nicely described as "an Arcadia of sickness."

Again, there is no mistaking Jaeggy's delight in plumbing the depths of "graves that nest in our minds." And yet *Sweet Days of Discipline* is a rich and affecting book, animated by a disciplined austerity, its terse beauties falling on the reader like a chaste gray rain. What is diseased and stagnant in its landscape is not set out to shock or to titillate. There is no preening at the edge of the void. The gloom and the sourness, the traces of "fervorless indolence," evoke a condition of spirit that is never self-satisfied.

The key to Jaeggy's achievement is the relationship between the narrator and a student named Frederique, whom she courts with the hopeless idolatry of youthful infatuation. Though other characters move through the novel, Frederique is critical to its extremity, its terse ambivalence. For she is a kind of fanatic, an absolutist whose example makes everything else seem by contrast paltry, childish, ordinary. From her first appearance she is described as "disdainful," "an idol," a person who "had no humanity." Her hands are cold, her writing artificial. Contact with her is invariably "so anatomical that the thought of flesh or sensuality eluded us." She shows neither emotion nor vanity. She is "impregnable," "a nihilist with no passion," "a sickle moon in an oriental sky. While the people sleep she cuts off their heads." In later life she remains for her childhood companion a force, a goad, one who "goes on ahead of me."

This novel is not in its deepest instincts a work of decadence. There is nothing peremptory about it. It keeps its distance from Frederique as from

every prospect of consolation. What "goes on ahead" in this book is a kind of hard, gratuitous indifference to the ordinary investments and sentiments of this world. Yet the indifference is never achieved, the hauteur is never completed. For Frederique is admirable and repellent, an example of perfection and an example of sickness, aversion, incapacity. Her lassitude and her despotism are at once mesmerizing and pathetic. She is clearly a disturbed young girl, and we are not at all surprised to learn in the end that she spent many years of her adult life in a mental institution. Her acolyte, the narrator, will always lag behind Frederique in her knowledge of the void, in her identification with solitude and death; but when she recalls that as a girl she "envied the world," it is the mark of her difference, her saving distance from Frederique and her alluring nullities.

A novel of decadence would not permit its central character the regret and the pathos that we hear in this novel. The narrator tears up "the rare letter from my mother or father," and that she associates "exhilaration" and cheerfulness with "selfishness" and "vendetta"; but she is no flower of evil. She takes a kind of satisfaction from avoiding Frederique. She tastes, now and then, a voluptuous pleasure in disappointment and pain, but it is not pleasure that she tastes when, at the station in her uniform, she waits for a train that will stop for three minutes before moving on. "There I stood," she reports, "spruced up, to see her pass by, go through the station, then she would be taking the Andrea Doria and sailing across the ocean, my *maman*." To be sure, she "foresaw the pain, the desertion, with an acute sense of joy"; but this peculiar joy is associated with something "malicious, there's poison in it." It is pain that is not truly mastered; unwelcome pain; pain that contaminates.

Jaeggy's novel has been described as "a prose poem." Joseph Brodsky saw in it the "engraver's needle depicting roots, twigs, and branches of the tree of madness." But though there is in the novel, as in Jaeggy's successful stories, a continuity of pitch and idiom, there is also an undermusic that works against the grain of the austerities and the abnegations. Jaeggy may seem to take her familiar pleasure in showing us that the "happy" family seated near her youthful narrator—they "generated an air of such happiness . . . displayed an almost stubborn happiness"—will shortly be blasted by the suicide of the

youngest daughter; but this pleasure is short-lived, bitter. She notes "the icicles weeping on the branches outside." Whatever the inclination to melancholia and denial, we hear the steady, distant, elusive call of "the good things in life," the "good news" that some of us have been "taught" to resist, to "renounce," to "fear."

Does any of this amount to a philosophy? Jaeggy is a writer, not a philosopher. She is content with the evocation of a tension in which the idyll of the happy housewife is as remote as the fanaticism of renunciation. Of "order and submission," her narrator says at one point—she might also have included revolt and torpor—"you can never know what fruits they will bear. . . . You might become a criminal or, by attrition, a normal conventional person." The result of this uncertainty is not a cultivated indifference or a reckless licentiousness, it is an almost elegiac longing for something—Jaeggy knows not quite what it is—that she might almost wish to believe in. And there is nothing less decadent than an elegy.

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God is a dangerous idea—whether Ganimistic or vitalistic, theistic or deistic—perverting justice in ethics and politics. Of ancient philosophies Epicureanism alone disposed of this problem with coherent doctrines about chance/necessary interaction of atoms, about evolutionary development, and about basic biological drives. The historical Jesus agreed more with this than with Judaism—more atheist/realist than theist/idealist—as indicated by a recently unearthed document that claims to be enigmatic *ipsissima verba* of Jesus noted by an evidently puzzled student who wandered with him. Jack Hannah corroborates this claim with other independent ancient documents. All pertinent texts and commentary are provided.

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NEW YORK DIARIST

Left out

"SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!" A friend was addressing me. Well, he was screaming at me. Our friendship had long been strained, and now it was snapping. The occasion was the regular meeting of a lefty discussion group, at which a Croatian-American intellectual had just finished a brilliant presentation on the Balkans. I should have known trouble was coming. People had been shushing me all night whenever I murmured an emphatic "yes!" in response to some point our guest had made. I couldn't help myself—the subject of mass murder brings out the mad, impulsive fellow in me. And my friend had shushed the loudest. A militant leader of the Movement during the '60s, in recent years he had transferred his emotional affinities to the idea of civil society and to the writings of Richard Rorty. So, when I excitedly challenged a long-winded questioner with a question of my own, my friend began to shriek at me in the name of civil society.

DON'T GET ME WRONG. THERE were many good and honest and intelligent people in this group. But the atmosphere had seemed to grow tenser and more formal in the short time since I had been invited in. And the yackety-yak that had discouraged me from coming regularly had thickened. All this was partly due, I believe, to the increasingly inhibiting presence of no fewer than three editors from *The New York Times*, who also had been welcomed into the monthly get-togethers. The paper of record was listening. And, for some in the group, professional opportunity was beckoning. Usually, the *Times* people were reticent and restrained, though one of them—Ms. X—had determinedly begun organizing some meetings and choosing subjects and speakers herself.

TONIGHT, HOWEVER, THE *TIMES* brought down its mighty hand. After the shrieking had stopped, Mr. Y commenced speaking. Mr. Y loved to talk interminably; he was the (affectionate) despair of the group. He was also a politically savvy, wise, experienced, disheveled, vulnerable eccentric of the kind one sometimes finds in leftish precincts, and he is someone I hope God will always

protect. Other people in the group felt the same way about him and would let him go on. This time it was different. The moment Mr. Y opened his mouth, one *Times* editor—Ms. Z—primly told him to be quiet. And he became quiet. I saw some people shaking their heads, looking as if they wanted to flee. All the Jews fit to sprint. Still, the next day, I called Ms. X and made a date for lunch two weeks from this writing. This was New York, in the anxiously competitive year of 1998, after all.

THE RORTYITES AND THE YACKETY-yaks might be smug and slippery, but at least they know that you can be for, say, organized labor and universal health care while despising communism. Such is not always the case with that revolutionary, passionately pro-labor institution, *The New York Times*. Consider the way the *Times* covered the recent two-day celebration, at Cooper Union in New York, of the 150th anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto*'s publication. The article is very careful and very discreet. The *Manifesto* is "compact, biting and, yes, sometimes turgid." The Soviet Union was a "grand ruinous experiment." Alexander Solzhenitsyn, say hello to Emily Post. And why, according to the *Times*, did 900 people show up at Cooper Union for the festivities? Because of "the poverty of political discourse these days." Presumably, for the editors at 229 West 43rd Street, the turgid and, yes, sometimes compact Anthony Lewis and A.M. Rosenthal are now chopped liver.

WORST OF ALL, YOU WOULD NOT know from this hollow homage that there was any other kind of left than the communist left. That there has been a grand and honorable left. And you would not know precisely how "ruinous" this communist left was. Under the pretext of radical enthusiasm, the *Times* likes to identify the left with its most despicable elements while clothing itself in brainless multicultural and faux-progressive sentiments. As if the fate of democratic-left ideas rested on dew-eyed nods to the Black Panthers. Marx would have seen through all this hypocritical flummery quicker than you can say "*Grundrisse*."

INVESTING SPARE SENTIMENT IN flashy political extremes offers the highest moral yield around. Hollywood knows that, too. One of the more ludicrous features of the two-day Marxathon was the presence of that great American

radical, Wallace Shawn. Shawn has surpassed Brecht's alienation effect. He does not merely write alienating plays; he writes bad alienating plays. This is a double blast at the bourgeoisie. And so here he was, in Cooper Union's arched and pillared Great Hall, sitting on stage with seven other people. Among them were the playwright Tony Kushner and the South African poet Dennis Brutus, who was filling in for the no-show Amiri Baraka. The idea was to read the entire *Manifesto*, each person taking a different part.

I HAD THOUGHT THAT MARX AND

Engels's dazzling rhetorical masterpiece would be immune to tedious recitation, but the *Manifesto* did not exactly spring to life in Shawn's hands. He made it sound like Eustace Tilley Jr.'s dinner with Karl and Friedrich. But there was a bigger surprise in store for the audience the following night. Here we were

treated to a roundtable discussion of the *Manifesto* with, among others: an editor of *Monthly Review*; *The Nation*'s Europe correspondent; professor Cornel West; and ... the paleontologist, evolutionary biologist, and baseball aficionado Stephen Jay Gould! What Gould was doing there I could not tell you. He could not tell you. Maybe he thought he would meet some real dinosaurs. He looked stunned, as if he had entered Yankee Stadium only to find himself in a hospital in Baku. But he gave it the old Harvard try. Scientific socialism was a misnomer, he haltingly informed the small gathering, because science does not declare anything inevitable. Nervous laughter. And anyway, he stammered reassuringly, humanity is only a blink of eternity's eye. Just what everybody needed to hear.

THE WEEKEND TRIBUTE TO violent revolution may have been revolting, but the crowd was not entirely so. There were sullen kooks and bright-eyed zealots but also decent people, union organizers, labor activists, public school teachers, and the like. They were not mixing with fancy *New York Times* editors. Life had long been telling some of them to shut up. Yet they persisted. Thinking about them, and also about people like Mr. Y, I am moved. So let me try for a solid gesture in a fluid time. Dear Ms. X, forget about lunch. In present-day New York, in this anxiously competitive moment, I suddenly feel like Rosa Luxemburg.

LEE SIEGEL



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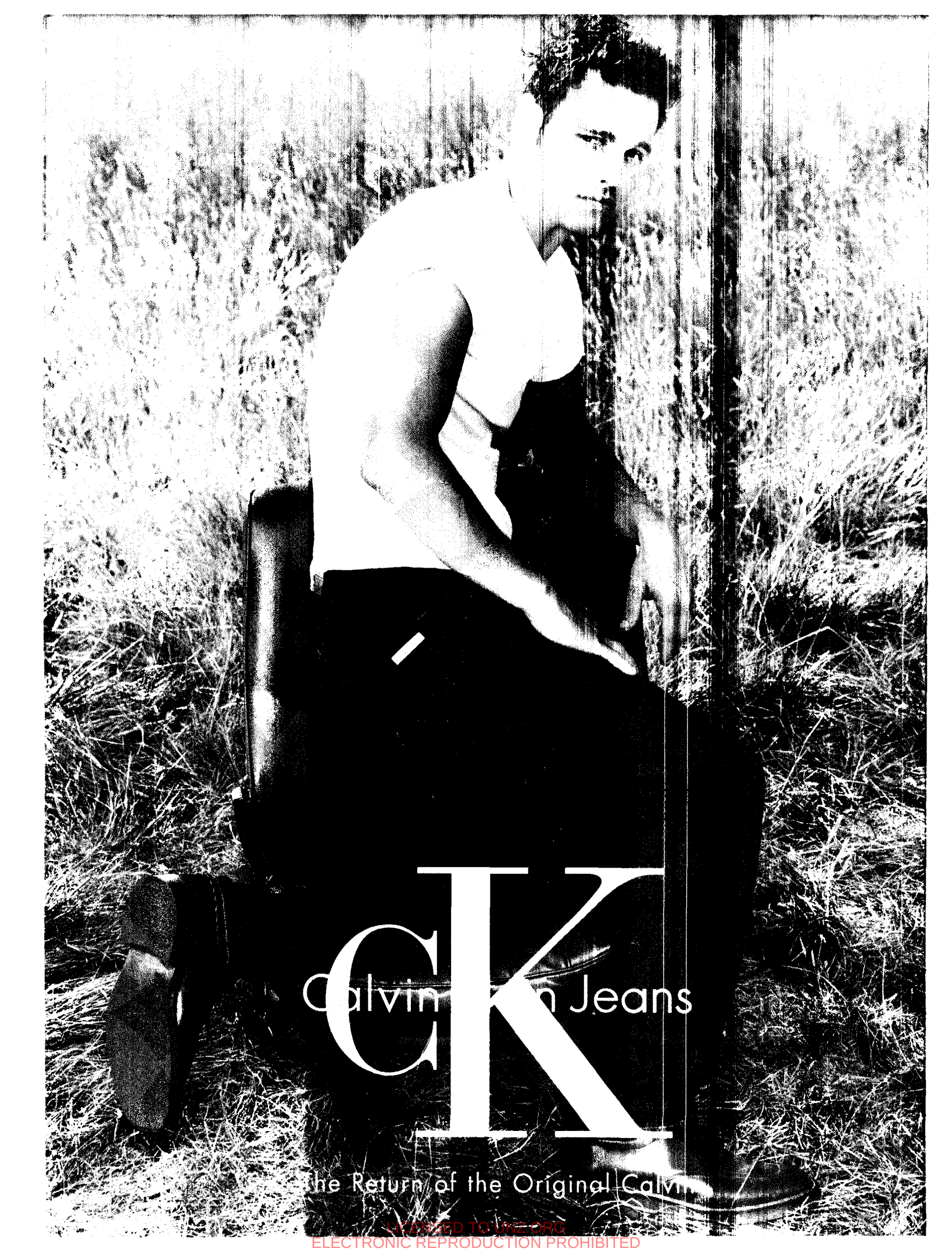
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